Breaking the Cycle of Gridlock

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There are increasing signs that the liberal international order created after 1945 risks collapse. While populism and nationalism are on the rise across the world, we are also more connected than ever before. Because these connections create not only gains and opportunities, but also losses and risks, they require careful management. And yet we are not rising to this challenge. A series of global collective action problems, from the spread of weapons of mass destruction to climate change, threaten to render our societies weaker, poorer, and more violent. There is a substantial risk that humankind may not end the twenty-first century as well as it began it.

How these existential challenges are governed, and why their governance has been so inadequate, has preoccupied us for many years. In *Gridlock*: *Why Multilateralism Is Failing When We Need It Most*, published with Kevin Young in 2013, we sought to understand and explain the achievements and the limits of the postwar order. We concluded that deep structural trends, rooted in the extraordinary success of international cooperation and the transformations it allowed, now undermine its continued effectiveness and responsiveness. We set out a bleak picture of how gridlock paralyses multilateral governance, with dangerous implications.

This grim picture has stayed with us, and in some cases darkened further. However, it does not capture significant exceptions to the gridlock argument. Over the last three years we, in collaboration with eleven analysts of world politics,[1] have explored and examined these anomalies, and tried to understand the balance between the pressures of gridlock, on the one side, and pressures for change, on the other. The resulting project, *Beyond Gridlock* (Hale, Held, et al. 2017), aims to understand these trends in order to inform strategies that can begin to break the cycle of gridlock. Drawing from this work, this article sets out seven pathways through and beyond gridlock, explains their significance, and highlights relevant evidence to support the main arguments. We begin by setting out why gridlock remains so central to any analysis of global governance, noting how it can perpetuate itself through the corrosive effect of unmanaged globalization on domestic politics. This sobering context makes the pathways

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'through' and 'beyond' gridlock all the more remarkable. As the pathways are elaborated and applied to contemporary counter-trends to gridlock, a picture of global governance emerges that is more resilient, adaptive, and innovative than the original gridlock argument countenanced.

Self-Reinforcing Gridlock and the Rise of Nationalism

One of the central concepts developed in *Gridlock* was "self-reinforcing interdependence" (Hale, Held and Young 2013), the mutually enabling relationship between globalization and the institutionalization of world politics that profoundly deepened interdependence over the postwar period. The idea is that international cooperation is not just a response states use to manage existing interdependence; over time, cooperation also increases the links between economic and social systems across borders, deepening interdependence further. For example, trade agreements create incentives for companies to develop global supply chains and invest in technologies that facilitate cross-border production, changing their business models and building new constituencies for trade. The resulting increase in interdependence creates additional political incentives for countries to cooperate further, beginning the cycle again. We argued in *Gridlock* that this historical process of partially endogenous interdependence deepened to such a degree over the postwar period that a number of "second order" cooperation problems arose – namely, multipolarity, harder problems, institutional inertia, and fragmentation – causing gridlock.

Today it seems clear that gridlock itself also has a self-reinforcing element, one that emerges from the corrosive effect of unmanaged globalization on domestic politics. The rise of nationalism and populism across the world, in many different kinds of countries, has multiple and complex origins. But this trend can be seen as part of a downward spiral in which gridlock leads to unmanaged globalization or unmet global challenges, which in turn help to provoke anti-global backlashes that further undermine the operative capacity of global governance institutions (figure 1).

Figure 1: The vicious cycle of self-reinforcing Gridlock
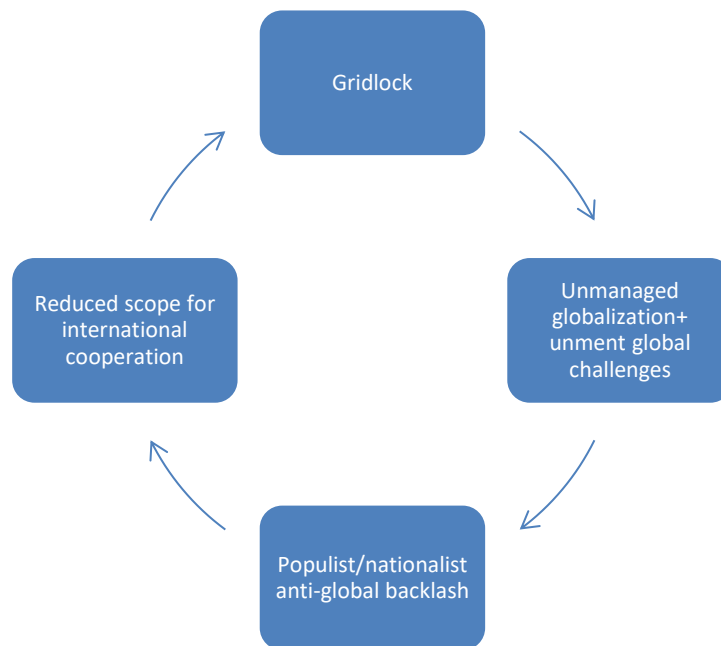
Consider each dynamic in turn. First, as per the gridlock argument, we face a multilateral system that is less and less able to manage global challenges, even as growing interdependence increases our need for such management. Second, in many areas this inability to manage globalization or to meet global challenges has led to real, and in many cases severe, harm to major sectors of the global population, often creating complex and disruptive knock-on effects. Perhaps the most spectacular recent example of harm caused by mismanaged interdependence was the 2008–9 financial crisis. A product of inadequate regulation in major economies and at the global level, the crisis wrought havoc on the world economy in general, and on many countries in particular, which was reinforced in many places by severe austerity measures that tried to limit the fallout. We should not be surprised that such significant impacts have led to further destabilization.

Third, what has become clear only several years after the crisis is not just the economic cost, but the scale of the political destruction to which the crisis contributed. Rising economic inequality, a long-term trend in many economies, has been made more salient by the crisis. It reinforced a stark political cleavage between those who have benefited from the globalization, digitization, and automation of the economy, and those who feel left behind in the wake of these powerful disruptions. The global financial crisis was not the only cause of many of the political disruptions that have come to characterize and realign politics in major

countries in the last few years, but it has been a critical contributing factor in several of them, building on the economic dislocations that globalization had effected over several decades (Colgan and Keohane 2017). Perhaps most importantly, the financial crisis sharpened the divide between working-class voters in industrialized countries, who were hit hard by the events, and other segments of the population. This division is particularly acute in spatial terms, in the cleavage between global cities and their hinterlands. Global cities like London, Paris, Shanghai, New York, and San Francisco have become nodes of power and influence in the global economy, linked to each other through a variety of social and economic networks. Their citizens have benefited directly as opportunities have sharply risen. By contrast, those in the hinterlands, typically rural areas and deindustrialized cities, but not exclusively so, have often been left behind in absolute and relative terms, building up frustrations and resentments.

The effect on politics has been profound, with a number of nationalist and populist movements emerging and, in some cases, winning elections (or otherwise seizing power) in many countries. Again, we should not be surprised that people exposed to the negative effects of globalization will turn against it. Research shows that over the course of history, right-wing populist movements and financial crises are strongly correlated (see Funke, Schularick and Trebesch 2016). Relatedly, the 2008 crisis exacerbated many of the woes that have beset the eurozone since 2010, such as the repeated bailouts of Greece and other countries, and consumed European politics, driving voters on both the creditor and debtor side of the political chasm towards Euro-scepticism. And more broadly, the impact on the centre-left parties that have traditionally supported global and regional cooperation has also been severe, with the differential effects of globalization straining the traditional coalition between metropolitan progressives and the working class.

The financial crisis is only one area where gridlock has undercut the management of global challenges and undermined political support for global cooperation. Consider the global response to terrorism. International cooperation, though effective in many areas, has failed to prevent extremists from attacking civilians around the world. While relatively cohesive and centralized networks like Al Qaeda have been largely taken apart through a combination of aggressive policing, surveillance, drone attacks, and other techniques, more inchoate movements like the Islamic State are much harder to root out. The attacks by these groups, for example in Paris in 2015, have been all too effective in creating a public discourse in many countries that sees perpetual war between Islamists and the West. This sentiment, in turn, creates political pressure for militarized responses from the West that can create as

many terrorists as they eliminate, as well as anti-Muslim policies that breed further resentment.

These negative effects also spill across issue areas. The failure to manage terrorism and to bring to an end the wars in the Middle East has had a particularly destructive impact on the global governance of migration. With millions of refugees fleeing their countries in search of safety and a better life for their families, many of them heading for Europe, the global forced migration regime has been overwhelmed. Many recipient countries have seen a potent political backlash from right-wing national groups and disgruntled populations, which further reduces the ability of countries to generate effective solutions at the regional and global level.

We see trends toward nationalism and populism across many different kinds of countries, from Trump's United States to Duterte's Philippines, from Putin's Russia to Brexit Britain, from Modi's India to Erdoğan's Turkey. The anti-global backlash is heterogeneous and rife with contradictions. It encompasses terrorism in the name of Islam and Islamophobic discrimination against Muslims. It includes leftist rejection of trade agreements and right-wing rejection of environmental agreements. One powerful tie that unites these disparate movements is a rejection of interdependence and collective efforts to govern it. Global institutions and (perceived) cosmopolitan elites have always been a potent and politically expedient whipping boy for nationalist and populists, even when those institutions, or some other form of international cooperation, are needed to tame the socio-economic forces that inflamed populist movements to begin with. This undermining of global cooperation, whether for migration, terrorism, financial regulation, climate change, or other areas, is the fourth and final element of self-reinforcing gridlock. As the global trend to nationalism and populism undermines the effectiveness of global institutions even further, the whole cycle begins anew.

In short, the destructive power of unmanaged interdependence has been unleashed by, in no small part, deepening gridlock in critical areas of global governance. It is important to note that such dynamics have long been familiar to many countries in the global South, which have always felt the sharpest edges of globalization and interdependence in the form of "structural adjustment" measures from international financial institutions, military interventions, and other intrusive forms of global governance. For many years, the developed countries' wealth and political power insulated them from the worst elements of globalization, while their welfare states softened global capitalism enough to make it politically palatable for comfortable majorities of the population. This compromise of "embedded liberalism" (Ruggie 1982) – in which social democracy gave populations the

protection they needed to liberalize their economies – a cornerstone of the postwar order, now seems increasingly inadequate and threadbare.

Moving 'through' and 'beyond' Gridlock

Given this self-reinforcing dynamic, gridlock is arguably even more structurally embedded in global politics than we argued in *Gridlock* in 2013. But at the same time it is possible to detect and analyse a number of significant counter-trends to these powerful developments. The central argument of *Beyond Gridlock* is that these systematic exceptions and qualifications to the logic of gridlock allow for strategies that provide concrete pathways out of gridlock. Some of them are even direct reactions to, or adaptations in response to, gridlock. Gridlock may be widespread and structural, but it is not omnipresent or determinative. Understanding these pathways and reinforcing them over time can allow actors to build more workable forms of global governance going forward, even under adverse conditions.

Before describing them, it is important to be more specific about what is meant by moving 'through' and 'beyond' gridlock. These terms refer to positions along a continuum of change in the outcomes of interest. "Through" connotes incremental yet significant improvements. "Beyond," in turn, refers to a more fundamental transformation. While we expect moves through gridlock to be, on average, shorter in term than moves beyond gridlock, we do not assume a single temporal relation between the two. Various incremental steps may cascade into more profound transformations; alternatively, critical junctures or "punctuated equilibria" may provoke large realignments with great speed.

The issue we seek to address is: how can global governance become more robust and effective vis-à-vis the transborder policy challenges it seeks to address? Analytically, it is useful to separate this object of analysis into two sets of outcomes. First, we are concerned with the institutions and processes of global governance. Can we see the possibility of more cooperation and compliance and new, or newly effective, institutions, or simply further crisis and stagnation? Here we are particularly interested in explaining the creation, use, and effectiveness of transborder institutions and the patterns of state and non-state behaviour that play out around them. Can institutions emerge that provide collective benefits? Are rules created that stand a reasonable chance of shaping behaviour? Can existing institutions be reformed to become more efficacious?

Second, we are concerned with the impact of global governance on human welfare. Can and does more cooperation lead to better outcomes? If new or stronger

intergovernmental or transnational institutions emerge, do they have a significant and positive impact on the problems they seek to address? Or is their impact negligible? In relation to this second set of outcomes, it is of course essential to ask *for whom* the impact of global governance is positive or negative. In the abstract, we may wish to define effectiveness in general terms of public good provision. Can global governance arrangements in a given issue area meet the functional needs created by interdependence or not? For many issues, of course, the impact of global governance creates both winners and losers. Shifts in global governance may both help to resolve the functional dilemmas of interdependence while also disadvantaging or privileging specific actors or groups. Teasing out these differentiated impacts is crucial.

In what follows, then, we understand pathways through and/or beyond gridlock as causal processes that (a) improve the institutions and processes of global governance and/or (b) improve the impact of global governance on human welfare broadly, with particular attention to the range of potential positive and negative impacts that may apply to different groups.

To address these issues satisfactorily requires of course a meaningful counterfactual. Does the process or impact of global governance improve *compared to what*? Because there is no single appropriate counterfactual, in *Beyond Gridlock* we evaluate the outcomes of interest against several different benchmarks, triangulating among them as appropriate. While reasonable readers may disagree with the specification of some of the counterfactuals employed in the arguments below, we seek to make our evaluations as transparent as possible by being explicit about our assumptions and points of comparison. It seems to us that such an approach is unavoidable. Implicitly or explicitly, all evaluations of current effectiveness or prospects for future effectiveness entail some counterfactual analysis; the point is to be clear about it.

Pathways through and beyond Gridlock

Pathways of change describe a constellation of conditions and causal mechanisms that apply across various domains. The pathways emphasize general factors like the preferences of states and other actors, the material and ideational processes that generate these preferences, the strategies actors employ, the institutional arrangements in which they operate, and power relations between them. Because we are interested in exploring tangible ways to advance effective global governance, the pathways emphasize relatively proximate and immediate dynamics, as opposed to more remote, structural, and long-term trends.

In thinking about what these pathways might be we drew on the expertise of outstanding academics and policy experts working in a diverse range of problem areas in global politics. We brought this group together twice: once in Durham in 2015 and once in Oxford in 2016. These were far-ranging and intense discussions in which expertise on specific topics came into dialogue with arguments concerning cross-cutting global trends. This process laid the foundations for the research on which this article is based, and generated an account of seven distinct pathways of change. Each pathway is described below and summarized in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Pathways through and beyond gridlock and their mechanisms

Pathways	Mechanisms
1. Shifts in major powers' core interests	• Gridlock can provoke or exacerbate systemic or regional crises creating incentives for major powers to provide global public goods
2. Autonomous and adaptive international institutions	• The accrual of authority in some international institutions has made them increasingly autonomous from the interests of their members • Some international organizations possess generative rule-making capacity to adapt to new circumstances
3. Technical groups with effective and legitimate processes	• Issue areas in which states delegate to experts are relatively insulated from gridlock trends • Transparent and rational procedures add legitimacy to technocratic decision-making
4. Multiple, diverse organizations and institutions coalesce around common goals/norms.	• Possible for "additive" or "expansionary" contexts, not "absolute" issue areas • Diffusion and entrenchment of common principles, norms, and goals across a policy domain
5. Mobilization of domestic constituencies for cooperation and compliance	• Socializing communities of actors in particular practices and norms • Institutional channels give leverage to domestic and regional actors
6. Civil society coalitions with reformist states	• Coalitions across state–civil society boundaries generate new political possibilities • Does not challenge core interests of key states
7. Innovative leadership as a reaction to gridlock	• Gridlock provokes innovative and entrepreneurial strategies (e.g. norm entrepreneurship).

1. *Shifts in major powers' core interests*

It is a core tenet of international relations theory that when one or more great powers have a strong national interest in policies that create a global public good, they will be willing and often able to provide that public good. Hard versions of Realist theory see this condition

as the only setting in which global public goods are likely to be provided, and it has been advanced as a prominent explanation for the postwar global order (Gilpin 1981). A central argument of *Gridlock* was that this mechanism has been decreasingly common in more recent decades, as growing multipolarity (1) increases the number of great powers that are required to act to provide a global public good in many issues domains; (2) increases the heterogeneity of interests among the great powers because states with very different political and economic systems weigh more heavily on world politics. Both of these effects make it less likely for a major power or a sufficient coalition of major powers to come together to provide a public good.

But while gridlock has reduced the conditions under which major powers will be able to provide global public goods as a positive externality of their national interests, it still remains possible, of course. Moreover, it may be the case that gridlock, by reducing the efficacy of multilateralism, generates exactly the kinds of crises that are most likely to bring together great powers in specific instances, despite long-term, structural trends to the contrary. For issues where (a) a great power (or sufficient coalition of powers) has a strong interest in solving a problem and (b) no other great powers are opposed, we might expect action to overcome gridlock. Such occasions typically arise only in the face of incontrovertible security threats when the relevant powers can gain much more from cooperation than from conflict. Such dynamics can be seen in the (fragile) P5+1 coalition (Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) that negotiated a nuclear settlement with Iran, in transgovernmental networks like the Financial Action Task Force (focused on money laundering, especially when connected to terrorist networks), in efforts to counter piracy around the Horn of Africa, in the launching of a concerted effort to tackle Ebola in West Africa, and in other security-oriented fields. But while major powers are able to jolt global governance through gridlock when they develop an interest in doing so, these interventions tend to be too narrow, ad hoc, and reversible to constitute a path truly beyond gridlock.

In climate and health, for example, action by major powers has provided an important pathway through previous gridlock, but does not yet qualify as transformational. In health, there has been a vast increase in funding from the G-7 for critical diseases, but not yet a full-fledged effort to build robust health systems around the world to make diverse populations more resilient (Brown and Held 2017). In climate, shifting interests in the United States and China allowed the regime to evolve with the adoption of the Paris Agreement (Hale 2017). But such shifts cannot be taken for granted. The election of Donald Trump in the United

States provides a vivid example of how major powers' priorities can suddenly shift against more effective cooperation. This reversibility highlights a key limitation of this pathway. There is no guarantee that major powers' interests will shift in a way that counterbalances gridlock. Indeed, given global trends towards nationalism, the opposite may be more likely in the foreseeable future. So while shifts in major powers may lead to occasional breakthroughs in specific areas, the mechanism in general is unlikely on its own to provide a long-term pathway beyond gridlock.

2. *Autonomous and adaptive international institutions*

      Gridlock argued that the past 70 years of international institution-building has had a profound effect on world politics, with many positive outcomes, but also a number of second-order cooperation problems (e.g. institutional inertia and fragmentation) that result from a denser institutional landscape. While it is of course well recognized that under some conditions international institutions have become formidable autonomous actors in world politics (Barnett and Finnemore 2005), on average, we might expect gridlock to reduce the ability of international institutions to act proactively in world politics, as they become stymied by diverging member state interests, challenged by alternative fora under growing fragmentation, or find that new and more complex problems exceed their mandates and functional resources.

      But there may also be systematic ways in which international organizations remain more autonomous and adaptive than these trends suggest, or even gain authority as multilateralism gridlocks. First, some international institutions have not seen their mandates or capabilities reduced under gridlock. The International Energy Agency (IEA), for example, possesses significant autonomy to decide on fuel reserve requirements, and its restrictive membership (only involving countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)) has ensured that it has not been hamstrung by contestation across member states (Florini 2017). More generally, while an organization's autonomy is not independent of the underlying problem structure or interests of states (which had to decide to set it up that way in the first place), we expect many cases in which institutional inertia actually provides some benefits by counterbalancing multipolarity. Institutions, created under conditions of relatively less gridlock, can retain at least some of their autonomy even under conditions of increasing gridlock. Even in areas with sharp distributional implications or high sovereignty costs, some institutions have proven sufficiently autonomous and adaptive to chart a course through gridlock. For example, though the WTO's negotiation function has

stalled, the other elements of the global trade regime, including standard-setting, technical cooperation, and dispute resolution, have endured.

Moreover, some international institutions have been given unique capacities to adapt to emerging issues and shifting constellations of power and interests. This ability may be particularly strong for legal institutions, which possess a "generative" function: the ability to decide new rules for situations not originally envisioned by states. For example, the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) has been increasingly called upon to adjudicate cases for which WTO members have established no clear sets of rules. Many of these controversial cases have even involved member states, such as China, that joined the WTO significantly after the treaty-making process had occurred, and which we might therefore expect to challenge existing rules. Despite these difficult circumstances, the WTO adjudicators have developed a careful, politically informed jurisprudence that has been able to resolve disputes over a number of issues beyond what the WTO's creators originally envisioned, and has ensured a relatively high rate of compliance with these decisions. Ironically, gridlock in trade negotiations between countries may have strengthened the DSM's autonomy by forcing it to fill some of the rule-making gaps countries have left unfilled.

One of the interesting features of this pathway is the ability of such institutions to reassert their centrality in an increasingly plural institutional landscape. A reinvigorated WTO may be able to strengthen its coordination of the welter of preferential trade agreements that have developed in recent years and therefore bring greater coherence to global trade rules (Klasen 2017). Similarly, the IMF is looking to play a coordinating role in managing the proliferation of currency swap arrangements between central banks (Duran 2017). Such interactions suggest that the relatively strong international institutions that exist today can become focal points around which more comprehensive and effective global governance arrangements may accrete, merging with other pathways explored below. In this way autonomous and adaptive international institutions can maintain and even expand existing patterns of cooperation even under difficult conditions.

3. *Technical groups with effective and legitimate processes*

A related, but conceptually distinct pathway emphasizes the ability of technical groups to work effectively in a "low politics" context. It has long been recognized that cooperation is easier for more technical issues that avoid excessive interest conflicts or matters of "high politics" (Held 2004). Even when distributional problems exist, the low salience and complexity of such issues buffer them from conflictive politics. For these

reasons, we expect gridlock to apply significantly less in these areas. Like the autonomous and adaptive institutions discussed under pathway two, these entities are somewhat insulated from conflicts between member states. But unlike the other category, this insulation stems from the expertise-based nature of the issue, not necessarily an explicit delegation of authority by states or other power resources possessed by the institutions. To be sure, some institutions, such as international financial institutions, combine both autonomy and expertise.

But even purely technocratic institutions are vulnerable to the charge that they are unrepresentative, or privilege certain actors or others. The World Intellectual Property Organization, for example, has been subject to such challenges from developing countries. We therefore expect technocratic institutions to be especially insulated from the dangers of gridlock when they embody fair and transparent procedures that are likely to be seen as legitimate by a wide range of actors. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), for example, has managed to govern a potentially very contentious area of world politics, assigning domain names and protocols to govern the internet, an issue in which political and commercial actors have significant stakes. Yet these interests have not managed to upset the basic functioning of the institution, which has been able to provide an essential global public good.

Effective technical processes are often, unsurprisingly, "under the radar," but this does not diminish their importance. For example, while state-to-state treaty negotiations over reducing trade barriers get the most attention in the trade realm, standard setting, commercial dispute resolution, and export finance cooperation are also critically important to the global economy. Global governance in these areas, dominated by technocratic groups, many of them combining state and non-state actors, seems to be working quite well (Klasen 2017). Similar effectiveness can be observed in scientific cooperation around climate change, or in the realm of nuclear safety (Clarke 2017; Hale 2017). The importance of this pathway suggests that, in many ways, we take significant areas of global governance for granted, even in the academic literature. Thus, the gridlock narrative is missing out on important swathes of cooperation that are robust even in the face of challenging structural trends.

But by the same logic, this pathway is better at preserving cooperation and finding incremental gains than in fundamentally transforming our capacity to manage interdependence. Technical groups rarely, if ever, overturn the fundamental barriers to effective global governance. This is to be expected. Significant change almost always requires, virtually by definition, political mobilization, coalition building, and contestation.

4. *Multiple, diverse organizations and institutions coalesce around common goals/norms*

      Gridlock focused on the negative effects of fragmentation in global governance, such as the increase in transaction costs that may result, or the way in which forum shopping can undermine incentives for cooperation. However, there may also be ways in which fragmentation can represent an adaptive and effective response to the challenges of cooperation under conditions of gridlock. In particular, a plurality of actors and institutions can be mobilized to generate resources, political coalitions, and institutional structures that could not emerge from traditional state-to-state multilateralism. Such "webcraft" strategies (Slaughter 2017) open new possibilities despite, or even driven by, gridlock.

      This pathway may prove particularly fruitful when public goods provision is being held back by just a small group of spoilers and the good in question is not "absolute" but "additive" in nature. Additionally, a proliferation of diverse organizations and institutions may be particularly efficacious when common rules or principles give coherence to an otherwise fragmented institutional landscape. For example, transnational commercial arbitration represents a common set of practices and procedures for resolving disputes between commercial actors across borders. While it depends in part on international treaty law, the work of actually adjudicating disputes is carried out by hundreds of private legal organizations around the world specializing in commercial dispute resolution. The decisions of these bodies are then given force through domestic courts under both international and domestic law. Because common practices and rules guide this enormously diverse, pluralistic landscape, the regime functions in a strikingly consistent way across diverse countries and institutions (Hale 2015). It has also proven highly resilient, enduring across geopolitical shifts, including gridlock, that have undermined more formalized institutions.

      Even in areas or world politics characterized by gridlock trends, progress can be observed when a proliferation of organizations and actors cohere around a common purpose. Such a structure is vigorously in evidence in the realms of health and climate and energy, for example, where private actors, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and networks of cities, businesses, NGOs, and other sub/non-state actors have reshaped the governance landscape. In climate it is estimated that the actions of cities, businesses, and other sub/non-state actors can reduce as much carbon from the atmosphere as the pledges of nation-states (UNEP 2016). Similarly, in global health, private funds and funding channelled through hybrid institutions now constitute the majority of money going towards the management and mitigation of critical diseases in the developing world (Brown and Held 2017). In other words, for both

these issues, nation-states and formal intergovernmental processes have been joined by a wide array of complementary actors and institutions, which have made a qualitative improvement in the global governance of these areas.

A critical characteristic of these domains is that the proliferation of organizations and actors work towards a common goal. In climate, the common objective of limiting temperature change to 2°C or 1.5°C this century, established by the UNFCCC, has been directly translated into the objectives of many cities, businesses, regions, and other actors (Hale 2017). In global health, the International Health Regulations and numerous WHO guidelines (e.g. regarding what drugs to use) give coherence to the wider range of efforts now being undertaken (Brown and Held 2017). In addition, in the domain of human rights, national and transnational networks of non-state actors have used the international human rights regime developed in the 1960s and 1970s as a lever to insert the human rights agenda into numerous national polities (Pegram 2017). This is not to say that such polycentric systems do not suffer from relatively high transaction costs for coordination and some degree of redundancy. But the existence of common norms and objectives helps make plurality a virtue in these contexts.

This pathway can also be observed, but with more limited success, in humanitarianism, and envisioned as a potential way forward in the realm of investment. In the former, the existence of a coordinating committee with an established division of labour for humanitarian actors provides an important degree of coherence, though practice in the field has lagged behind the decisions taken by the global bodies headquartered in Geneva (McNally and Orbinski 2017). For investment, the norms dominating the field are now in state of flux, and it is currently unclear if one will emerge to provide a focal point for different dispute resolution institutions to cohere around (St John 2017). .

Of all the pathways, this merger of plurality and coherence seems to have the most transformative potential. In climate, health, and human rights, for example, the regimes have made enormous progress by tapping this broader array of actors. That said, the pathway also faces a critical scope condition: it only appears in areas where a wide range of actors possess the ability to make a positive contribution to the governance challenge in question. Because any number of actors and entities can affect climate, health or human rights, those issues are more amenable to a pluralistic strategy. This would not be the case for, say, nuclear security, tariff barriers or financial regulation, where the actors with the capacity to affect the problem are almost entirely nation-states.

5. *Mobilization of domestic constituencies for cooperation and compliance*

Because growing multipolarity can increase the divergence of preferences within the minimal set of states required to achieve cooperation, *Gridlock* expects cooperation to stall. Other scholars have instead emphasized the way in which global governance may shift states' interests in ways that promote cooperation over time, for example by "socializing" states in cooperative patterns or creating and reinforcing domestic interests groups that push for greater cooperation. This raises the possibility that states or other actors may make strategic interventions to mobilize certain constituencies in other states in order to increase the willingness of those states to cooperate or otherwise promote effective transborder governance. For example, various human rights institutions were created precisely to strengthen the role of pro-law, pro-rights bodies within domestic politics by elevating their voice to the international level. Likewise, international human rights norms can be used to mobilize significant political action by domestic actors, strengthening the hand of pro-compliance groups in domestic societies, in a way that strengthens the global governance of human rights. (Pegram 2017). Alternatively, the large investments that rich, green jurisdictions have made in renewable energy have lowered the costs of those technologies, making climate policies more attractive to less rich, less green countries by reducing opposition from economic groups concerned about the price of energy (Hale and Urpelainen 2015). The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change is animated by a similar logic, deploying various instruments – the review process, technical support for countries implementing climate policies, orchestration of climate action by transnational networks of sub- and non-state actors – that aim to strengthen support for pro-climate policies in countries over time.

6. *Civil society coalitions with reformist states*

Some of the greatest successes in global governance in the 1990s came about from concerted civil society efforts. When activist groups have been able to partner with progressive countries, significant shifts have been possible, such as the Mine Ban Treaty, the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement, or the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Transnational business interests have also proved adept at organizing support for certain global governance initiatives in partnership with governmental allies.

Yet, today such potential can be identified only in two realms: investment (St John 2017) and humanitarianism (McNally and Orbinski 2017). In the former, some developing

countries have been seeking to leave the investor–state dispute settlement system, while the EU has sought to create a public alternative to private arbitration. In the latter, many developed and developing countries have introduced significant improvements in the coordination and delivery of healthcare, both in emergency situations and in routine health service provision. In both cases, governments have been pushed by, and worked in tandem with, civil society activists. While it remains unclear whether and to what extent these changes will result in lasting transformations, the potential to do so seems strong

In contrast, in other areas, for example nuclear proliferation, human rights and financial regulation, we find little evidence at this time that civil society movements can fundamentally alter global gridlock. This finding is striking and discouraging because these areas have traditionally been targets for widespread activism, such as the peace and disarmament movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the struggle for human rights, most marked in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Occupy Wall Street movement that emerged after the 2008 crisis. We are thus left with the somewhat bleak conclusion that one of the most reliable traditional pathways to effective political change, and one of the pathways with the greatest transformative potential, seems to have a fairly narrow window for application at the present. This may, of course, change in due course as politics in many countries becomes more contentious and new generations redevelop social movements. But to the extent this possibility exists, it remains in the future. Civil society groups and social movements will be most successful in agenda-setting and policy impact if (a) they work with states and (b) seek change that, while reformist, can be accommodated within existing structures and organizational principles, at least in the short to medium term.

7. *Innovative leadership as a reaction to gridlock*

Gridlock and related arguments about the ineffectiveness of global governance typically rely on structural explanations, with shifts such as increasing multipolarity and complexity playing a key role. Emphasizing general patterns over idiosyncratic behaviours makes social scientific theories usefully parsimonious. But this exercise of course assumes that general patterns exist and explain a large amount of the phenomenon or outcomes of interest compared to more anecdotal accounts. It also tends to deemphasize the agency of individual actors and specific leaders.

But is it possible that the very fact of gridlock can itself increase the likelihood that individual actors will develop new forms of agency to overcome it? Faced with both an increasingly stymied international system, and with deepening interdependence and

challenges that affect their interests, individuals, states, and other actors may innovate and develop more sophisticated and effective strategies to meet the new challenges they face. In other words, it is possible that more difficult global challenges help generate innovative behaviours to overcome them. Even if such leadership remains the exception that proves the rule, it may be a significant dynamic in discrete areas of world politics, and offer hope and guidance to policymakers seeking proactive change in a gridlocked world.

Encouragingly, in several areas, states and other actors have responded positively and strategically to gridlock by exercising leadership of various kinds. In climate, for example, the way top UN officials and national diplomats shifted the regime from a "regulatory" to a "catalytic" model, by articulating a new vision of what multilateral institutions should do, helped unlock new political possibilities (Hale 2017). In health, the steep increase in funding for critical diseases by G7 countries and private entities like the Gates Foundation has made a crucial difference to the global disease burden (Brown and Held 2017). These kinds of constructive actions result from farsighted and public-spirited decisions taken by key individuals, some of them motivated by failures of global governance they could no longer abide. In this sense they represent "leadership" of the highest order.

Conclusion

This article has argued that self-reinforcing gridlock and the rise of nationalism pose major threats to the liberal international order. Gridlock not only emerges from self-reinforcing interdependence, in which globalization has deepened beyond the management capacity of the institutions that helped create it, but is also compounded by its pernicious impact on national politics. The result can be a schizophrenic crisis as we are caught between deepening interdependence and major global challenges that require sophisticated management, on the one hand, and populist and nationalist movements that seek to demolish or weaken our capacity to do so, on the other. Having said this, the article, drawing on the *Beyond Gridlock* project, focused on examining significant anomalies and counter-trends to these developments. Unpacking these systematically has revealed seven distinct pathways of change which provide the means and mechanisms to cut through or beyond gridlock. None of these pathways alone offer silver bullets. But they all highlight ways of moving through and beyond gridlock, even if the movements are small and incremental. One of the key lessons of this argument is that one size does not fit all. That is to say, there are several pathways to significant policy change, and it is necessary to grasp what works and why in different

sectors. Understanding how different issues and sectors are amenable to different pathways of change creates a capacity for practical strategies for working through and beyond gridlock.

The theory of gridlock and pathways through it helps us understand why the remarkable period of global cooperation which began with the founding of the UN, and deepened through subsequent decades of intensifying globalization, has now run into systematic difficulties, and how we might address these. The vicious circle of self-reinforcing gridlock compounds the problems and adds to the conditions that have spurred the rise of nationalism and anti-global backlash. While this urge to retreat from the international and global makes sense when the impact of globalization is pervasive and gridlock prevents its effective management, the reassertion of national autonomy in a globalized world does not increase control, it weakens it. Simply tearing down global institutions would only exacerbate global problems that give rise to discontent in the first place.

Although it has been shown that most change is incremental, transformative change beyond gridlock does happen. Major leaps forward in the institutional structures of nations and the world order often follow major wars and calamities. But political wisdom requires that we learn to make significant and strategic changes before tragedies unfold, and not just with hindsight. After all, our ability to harm ourselves has increased; when weapons of mass destruction, global pandemics, and environmental collapse loom, reform-through-crisis becomes a very unattractive option. Looking back at the institutional world order set down after 1945, and the reasons for its successes and failures, it is clear that we have to understand and grasp these if we are to avoid the cycle of calamitous tragedies and institutional change. How we shift from the postwar institutional order to a new structure of "sustainable interdependence" is a major long-term question, but productive steps are available, here and now. Building and strengthening institutions, shifting preferences in major states, new transnational coalitions of civil society working in partnership with states, and other shifts are an important part of this story. And innovative leadership is a significant channel to build these pathways through and ultimately beyond gridlock.

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