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Opposition in Global Governance: An Analytical Framework

Introduction

This chapter presents the analytical framework that guides our empirical investigations. The first part of the chapter is introductory. It recapitulates and discusses our definition of opposition in global governance and presents an overview of the types of agents in oppositional fields. In the second part of the chapter, we elaborate on the analytical tools used for answering our second research question – What is the pattern of civil society opposition targeting GGIs? At this point the aim is to find ways of characterizing the ‘oppositional’ field of CSOs targeting a particular GGI. The third and fourth parts of the chapter are related to our third research question – How can CSOs’ choice of strategy towards a particular GGI be explained? – and turn attention to the strategies of individual CSOs. We first present the different existing types of strategies and then develop a model for explaining CSOs’ choice of oppositional strategy towards a particular GGI.

The oppositional field

We define oppositions in global governance operationally as the sum total of CSOs that target a particular GGI with some level of disagreement. This definition is broad in the sense that it captures a wide variety of actors who target it from the inside as well as from the outside, and for different purposes. Formally organized NGOs as well as more loosely structured SMOs and activist networks are covered by this concept, as are actors belonging to different political camps. The definition is narrow in that it only concerns how civil society actors target particular GGIs. Of course, it is common for civil society actors to direct their claims at
multiple targets, to work simultaneously on national governments and different GGIs, but we are only concerned with their activities in this more limited sense.

The term ‘oppositional field’ was introduced in chapter 2 and only needs to be briefly recapitulated here. Conceiving of civil society in global governance analogously to an institutionalized (national) opposition allows us to capture a set of activities directed at a particular target, yet include a broad set of actors that may differ in levels of contentiousness and that may not identify as pertaining to the same movement. The conceptualization of opposition in the literature of the 1960s and 1970s is too narrow to directly transfer to the global governance context (and may even be too narrow to be fruitful for today’s national level as well), but a broader one such as Brack and Weinblum’s (2011: 74) may be used in both national and global governance contexts.

We argue that the qualities of opposition, both in general and in global governance, are at a meta-theoretical level better captured as a SAF than as a collective agent (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012). Actors in a SAF need not share political goals or collective identity, and need not stand in a uniform position of contentiousness vis-à-vis the targeted power. Instead, interactions within a SAF are as much about competition as cooperation. It is a configuration of actors that have broadly shared views of the purpose of the field and that partake in the same field-specific struggle. In our case, the purpose would be the need to represent civil society in relation to the GGI in question, and the struggle would concern who is to be civil society’s legitimate representative in this context. In a SAF, moreover, interactions are structured among other things by field-specific rules of action and by existing types of relationships between actors.

While an oppositional field is not an agent, it is made up of agents – and it is to them that we now need to turn. To begin, we need to handle the tension in that we delimit opposition in global governance to those CSOs that display ‘some level of disagreement’ to the GGI they counter, but at the same time we want to include agents with low as well as high degrees of contentiousness. How do we in practice distinguish oppositional and non-oppositional agents when ‘oppositional’ is conceived to include those with low levels of disagreement? We handle this question by excluding those that only function as service providers and/or merely carry out policies for the GGI, while including all advocacy organizations that in one way or another strive to change the policies of the GGI.1