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Beyond Compliance: Integrating Legal Norms, Social Values, and Administrative Practices in Global Governance

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Abstract

Global governance has evolved beyond traditional state-centric and compliance-based legal frameworks toward more complex and pluralistic systems of regulation. This article examines the limitations of a purely compliance-oriented approach and proposes an integrated conceptual framework that combines legal norms, social values, and administrative practices. Using a qualitative and normative methodology grounded in interdisciplinary literature, the study analyzes how these three dimensions interact to shape governance outcomes in transnational contexts. The findings reveal that legal norms alone are insufficient to ensure effective governance unless they are aligned with societal values and operationalized through adaptive administrative practices. Social values play a critical role in establishing legitimacy and guiding norm formation, while administrative practices function as the operational mechanisms that translate abstract norms into concrete actions. The study further demonstrates that global governance increasingly relies on hybrid arrangements involving state and non-state actors, soft law instruments, and performance-based regulatory tools. By synthesizing insights from global administrative law, legal pluralism, and governance theory, this article introduces a dynamic and relational model of governance that moves beyond compliance toward normative integration. The proposed framework contributes to theoretical debates by bridging legal, socio-legal, and administrative perspectives, and offers practical implications for policymakers seeking to design more legitimate, adaptive, and effective governance systems in an increasingly complex global environment.

Keywords: Global governance; Legal norms; Social values; Administrative practices; Legal pluralism; Governance theory.

Introduction


Global governance has undergone a profound transformation in recent decades, moving beyond traditional state-centric frameworks toward more complex, multi-layered systems of regulation and coordination. This transformation is driven by globalization, technological advancement, and the increasing interdependence of social, economic, and political systems. In this evolving landscape, governance is no longer confined to formal legal institutions but involves a dynamic interplay between legal norms, social values, and administrative practices.



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Traditionally, governance has been understood through the lens of compliance with formal legal rules. Legal positivism emphasized the role of codified norms and institutional enforcement mechanisms in shaping behavior. However, this approach has increasingly been criticized for its inability to capture the complexity of contemporary global governance, where non-state actors, informal norms, and hybrid regulatory mechanisms play a significant role. As a result, scholars have begun to explore alternative frameworks that integrate legal, social, and administrative dimensions of governance.

One important development in this regard is the emergence of Global Administrative Law (GAL), which seeks to extend principles of administrative law—such as transparency, accountability, and participation—beyond the state to global governance institutions. GAL highlights the growing importance of procedural norms in ensuring legitimacy and effectiveness in transnational regulation (Vadi, 2018). At the same time, scholars have emphasized the normative dimensions of global governance, arguing that legal frameworks must be evaluated not only in terms of efficiency but also in relation to social values and democratic principles (Stewart, 2015).

The interaction between legal norms and social values has become a central concern in socio-legal studies. Legal norms do not exist in isolation; they are shaped by and, in turn, shape the social values of the communities they govern. Social values serve as guiding principles in the formation of legal norms, influencing both their content and their implementation (Kantor, 2023). This relationship is particularly evident in the context of global governance, where diverse cultural and normative frameworks must be reconciled.

Moreover, the rise of transnational legal orders has further blurred the boundaries between law and non-law. Legal pluralism has become a defining feature of global governance, with multiple overlapping normative systems operating simultaneously (Zumbansen, 2011). These systems include formal international law, soft law, private standards, and social norms, all of which contribute to shaping behavior and expectations.

In addition to legal norms and social values, administrative practices play a crucial role in the functioning of global governance. Administrative practices refer to the routines, procedures, and decision-making processes through which governance is enacted. These practices are not merely technical or neutral; they are embedded in social and institutional contexts and have significant normative implications. Administrative practices can transform abstract legal norms into concrete actions, thereby shaping the lived reality of governance (Zherebtsov & Pavlov, 2019).

Despite these developments, there remains a significant gap in the literature. Much of the existing research treats legal norms, social values, and administrative practices as separate domains, rather than as interconnected elements of a unified governance framework. This fragmentation limits our understanding of how governance operates in practice and how it can be improved.

Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap by emphasizing the need for more integrated approaches. For example, theories of global governance have called for the incorporation of social and structural dimensions alongside institutional analysis (Scholte, 2020).



Similarly, research on global scripts highlights how norms, rules, and practices interact across different levels and domains (Block-Lieb, 2022).

Another important strand of literature focuses on the role of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, in shaping global governance. These actors often engage in self-regulation and the creation of private standards, which can complement or even substitute for formal legal norms (Park & Berger-Walliser, 2015). This development underscores the need to move beyond a narrow focus on compliance with formal rules and to consider the broader ecosystem of governance.

Furthermore, the increasing use of legal indicators and performance metrics in global governance has highlighted the role of administrative practices in shaping behavior. These tools not only measure compliance but also influence the behavior of actors by setting standards and expectations (Amariles, 2015). This performative aspect of governance further complicates the relationship between law, values, and practice.

At the same time, critical perspectives have pointed out the risks associated with the increasing reliance on market-based and technocratic forms of governance. These approaches can lead to the depoliticization of governance and the marginalization of social values (Nicola, 2023). This critique highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between efficiency and legitimacy in global governance.

In light of these developments, this article seeks to advance the literature by proposing an integrated framework that brings together legal norms, social values, and administrative practices in global governance. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to move beyond compliance-based approaches and to conceptualize governance as a dynamic and relational process. Rather than focusing solely on the enforcement of legal rules, this framework emphasizes the importance of aligning legal norms with social values and embedding them in effective administrative practices.

This integrated approach offers several advantages. First, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of governance by capturing the interactions between different normative and institutional elements. Second, it highlights the importance of legitimacy and social acceptance in ensuring the effectiveness of governance. Third, it offers practical insights for policymakers and practitioners by identifying pathways for improving governance through the alignment of norms, values, and practices.

The transformation of global governance requires a rethinking of traditional approaches that prioritize compliance with formal legal norms. By integrating legal norms, social values, and administrative practices, this article aims to contribute to the development of a more holistic and effective framework for global governance.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative, normative, and conceptual research methodology, focusing on theoretical synthesis rather than empirical data analysis. The research is grounded in



interdisciplinary scholarship, drawing from law, public administration, political science, and socio-legal studies.

The primary method used is systematic literature review and conceptual analysis. Relevant academic sources were identified and analyzed to examine the relationships between legal norms, social values, and administrative practices in global governance. The selection of literature was guided by relevance to key themes, including global administrative law, legal pluralism, socio-legal theory, and governance studies.

Conceptual analysis was employed to clarify key terms and constructs, such as “legal norms,” “social values,” and “administrative practices.” This process involved examining how these concepts are defined and used in different disciplinary contexts and identifying their common elements and points of divergence.

The study also utilizes a theoretical integration approach, combining insights from different theoretical frameworks to develop a cohesive model of governance. This approach recognizes that no single theory can fully capture the complexity of global governance and seeks to build a more comprehensive understanding through synthesis.

In addition, the research adopts a normative perspective, evaluating governance not only in terms of effectiveness but also in relation to principles such as legitimacy, accountability, and justice. This perspective is particularly important in the context of global governance, where traditional mechanisms of democratic accountability are often weak or absent.

The Limits of Compliance-Based Legalism in Global Governance

The first major finding highlights the inadequacy of compliance-centered legal frameworks in addressing the complexity of global governance. Traditional legal approaches emphasize rule enforcement, predictability, and hierarchical authority. However, in transnational contexts, governance increasingly occurs beyond the state, where enforcement mechanisms are fragmented and authority is diffused.

Global governance regimes often operate through soft law, voluntary standards, and hybrid arrangements that lack coercive enforcement but still significantly influence behavior. This phenomenon challenges the conventional assumption that compliance is driven primarily by legal sanctions. Instead, governance effectiveness depends on broader normative acceptance and institutional embedding.

Scholars have shown that global governance has evolved into a system of “governance without government,” where formal legal rules coexist with informal norms and private regulatory mechanisms (Calliess & Renner, 2009). Similarly, the expansion of Global Administrative Law reflects the shift from rigid legal control to procedural and participatory governance models (Vadi, 2018).

Moreover, the concept of “publicness” in global administrative law suggests that legitimacy is not derived solely from formal legality but also from adherence to principles such as transparency, rationality, and accountability (Kingsbury, 2009). This indicates a shift from rule-based compliance to value-based governance.



These findings suggest that compliance should be understood as a necessary but insufficient condition for effective governance. Legal norms must be embedded within broader social and institutional contexts to achieve meaningful impact.

Social Values as the Foundation of Legitimacy

The second key finding emphasizes the central role of social values in shaping the legitimacy and effectiveness of global governance. Legal norms do not operate in a vacuum; they are constructed, interpreted, and implemented within specific social contexts. As such, their acceptance depends on their alignment with prevailing social values.

Social values serve as normative benchmarks that guide the formation of legal norms and influence their interpretation. In administrative law, values play a crucial role even before a norm is formally established, shaping the goals and direction of regulatory frameworks (Kantor, 2023).

In global governance, the diversity of cultural, political, and social contexts complicates the integration of values. Different societies may prioritize different principles, such as efficiency, equity, human rights, or sustainability. This diversity creates tensions but also fosters pluralism, which can enhance adaptability and innovation.

Legal pluralism theory provides a useful lens for understanding this complexity. It highlights the coexistence of multiple normative systems, including formal law, informal norms, and private regulations (Zumbansen, 2011). These systems interact and influence each other, creating a dynamic and evolving governance landscape.

Furthermore, global governance increasingly incorporates ethical and social considerations, particularly in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence and environmental regulation. Normative frameworks in these areas emphasize fairness, inclusivity, and social responsibility, reflecting broader societal concerns (Erman & Furendal, 2022).

However, the integration of social values also raises challenges. Conflicting values can lead to fragmentation and contestation, undermining coherence and predictability in governance. Additionally, there is a risk that dominant actors may impose their values on others, leading to issues of legitimacy and equity.

Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that social values are indispensable for effective governance. They provide the moral foundation for legal norms and enhance their legitimacy and acceptance.

Administrative Practices as the Operational Core of Governance

The third major finding highlights the critical role of administrative practices in operationalizing governance. While legal norms provide the framework and social values provide direction, administrative practices translate these elements into concrete actions.

Administrative practices include decision-making procedures, regulatory processes, implementation mechanisms, and institutional routines. These practices are not merely technical; they embody normative choices and reflect underlying values.



Research shows that administrative practices function as a bridge between abstract norms and real-world outcomes, shaping how governance is experienced by individuals and institutions (Zherebtsov & Pavlov, 2019). In global governance, these practices often occur within complex networks involving state and non-state actors.

One important development is the increasing use of indicators, benchmarks, and performance metrics in governance. These tools serve both as measurement devices and as instruments of regulation, influencing behavior by setting standards and expectations (Amariles, 2015). This highlights the performative nature of administrative practices.

Additionally, the rise of hybrid governance arrangements, involving public-private partnerships and corporate self-regulation, underscores the importance of administrative practices in coordinating diverse actors. These arrangements often rely on flexible and adaptive mechanisms rather than rigid legal rules (Park & Berger-Walliser, 2015).

However, administrative practices are not without risks. They can be subject to bias, inefficiency, and capture by powerful interests. For example, global governance institutions may prioritize economic efficiency over social justice, leading to the marginalization of vulnerable groups (Nicola, 2023).

These findings suggest that improving administrative practices is essential for enhancing governance outcomes. This includes promoting transparency, accountability, participation, and inclusivity in decision-making processes.

Toward an Integrated Governance Framework

Building on the three findings above, this study proposes an integrated framework in which legal norms, social values, and administrative practices interact in a mutually reinforcing manner.

- a) Legal norms provide structure and stability
- b) Social values provide legitimacy and direction
- c) Administrative practices provide implementation and adaptability

This triadic model reflects a shift from linear, rule-based governance to a more dynamic and relational understanding of governance.

Importantly, the interaction between these elements is not static but evolves over time. Changes in social values can lead to the reform of legal norms, while innovations in administrative practices can reshape both norms and values. This dynamic process allows governance systems to adapt to changing conditions and challenges.

Recent theoretical developments support this integrated approach. Scholars have called for moving beyond state-centric and institutionalist models toward more holistic frameworks that incorporate social, structural, and normative dimensions (Scholte, 2020). Similarly, the concept of global scripts emphasizes the interconnectedness of norms, practices, and meanings across different contexts (Block-Lieb, 2022).

Furthermore, the notion of “fuzzy governance” highlights the fluid and multi-scalar nature of global governance, where boundaries of responsibility and authority are constantly negotiated (Hansen-Magnusson & Gehrke, 2024)



Implications for Theory and Practice

The integrated framework developed in this study has several important implications.

From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the literature by bridging the gap between legal, social, and administrative approaches to governance. It challenges the dominance of compliance-based models and highlights the importance of normative and institutional integration.

From a practical perspective, the framework provides guidance for policymakers and practitioners. It suggests that effective governance requires not only the formulation of sound legal norms but also their alignment with social values and their implementation through effective administrative practices.

This approach is particularly relevant in addressing global challenges such as climate change, digital governance, and public health, where traditional regulatory mechanisms are often insufficient.

Conclusion

This article has critically examined the evolving nature of global governance by moving beyond a narrow compliance-based understanding of law toward a more integrated framework that incorporates legal norms, social values, and administrative practices. The central argument advanced in this study is that effective governance in a globalized and complex world cannot be achieved through legal enforcement alone but must emerge from the dynamic interaction of normative, social, and institutional dimensions.

The analysis demonstrates that traditional legal frameworks, while essential for providing structure and predictability, are inherently limited when applied to transnational governance contexts. The fragmentation of authority, the proliferation of non-state actors, and the increasing reliance on soft law mechanisms challenge the assumption that compliance with formal legal rules is sufficient to ensure governance effectiveness. Instead, legal norms must be understood as part of a broader normative ecosystem in which legitimacy, acceptance, and adaptability play equally important roles. This finding aligns with the broader shift in global governance scholarship toward recognizing the importance of procedural principles and normative legitimacy (Kingsbury, 2009); (Stewart, 2015).

Furthermore, this study underscores the foundational role of social values in shaping governance outcomes. Social values are not merely external influences on legal systems; they are constitutive elements that inform the creation, interpretation, and implementation of legal norms. In the context of global governance, where diverse cultural and normative frameworks coexist, the alignment between legal norms and social values becomes a critical determinant of legitimacy. As highlighted in socio-legal scholarship, values guide the goal-setting of legal norms and influence their societal acceptance (Kantor, 2023). However, this diversity of values also introduces complexity, requiring governance systems to be flexible, inclusive, and responsive to competing normative claims.



In addition to legal norms and social values, the study identifies administrative practices as the operational core of governance. Administrative practices translate abstract norms and values into concrete actions, shaping how governance is experienced in practice. These practices encompass decision-making procedures, regulatory mechanisms, and institutional routines, all of which play a crucial role in determining governance outcomes. Importantly, administrative practices are not neutral; they embody normative choices and can either reinforce or undermine the legitimacy of governance systems. The increasing use of indicators, benchmarks, and hybrid governance arrangements further illustrates the centrality of administrative practices in contemporary global governance (Amariles, 2015); (Park & Berger-Walliser, 2015).

By synthesizing these three dimensions, this article proposes an integrated governance framework that conceptualizes global governance as a dynamic and relational process. In this framework, legal norms provide the structural foundation, social values provide normative direction, and administrative practices provide mechanisms for implementation and adaptation. The interaction between these elements is characterized by mutual reinforcement and continuous evolution, allowing governance systems to respond to changing conditions and emerging challenges. This perspective is consistent with recent theoretical developments that emphasize the need for more holistic and multi-dimensional approaches to global governance (Scholte, 2020).

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature by bridging the gap between legal, socio-legal, and administrative approaches to governance. It challenges the dominance of compliance-based models and offers a more comprehensive understanding of governance as an interplay of norms, values, and practices. Practically, the proposed framework provides valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to design and implement more effective governance systems. It highlights the importance of aligning legal frameworks with societal values and ensuring that administrative practices are transparent, accountable, and inclusive.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. As a conceptual and normative analysis, it does not provide empirical validation of the proposed framework. Future research should explore the application of this framework in specific governance contexts, such as climate governance, digital regulation, or public health systems. Empirical studies could provide further insights into how the integration of legal norms, social values, and administrative practices operates in practice and how it can be optimized.

The transformation of global governance requires a fundamental rethinking of traditional approaches that prioritize compliance with legal norms. By embracing a more integrated and holistic perspective, governance systems can achieve greater legitimacy, effectiveness, and resilience in addressing the complex challenges of the contemporary world.



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