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“Exit” and “Voice” in the Provision of Global Public Goods Today

Abstract

Starting from the insights presented in Albert Hirschman’s *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* the present paper examines the role that “exit” and “voice” play today in the provision of global public goods (GPGs) such as global climate change mitigation, financial stability, or peace and security. The analysis will focus on both, the international negotiation side of the goods’ provision processes (i.e. the forging of agreements such as the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change) and on the side of agreement follow-up or implementation. The aim is to assess which elements of Hirschman’s theory remain valid, when they are taken to the global level and, especially, when applied to GPG provision under the current global policymaking realities.

The analysis shows that many elements remain valid but modifications and extensions are also needed. In recent decades, for example, more voice has been demanded and granted at the negotiation side of GPG provision. At the same time, more exit has been encouraged and happened on the implementation side (e.g. by leaving it up to individual actors to voluntarily determine what they are willing to contribute). The result is that GPGs requiring corrective action are addressed in myriad ways by myriad actors. However, these efforts often do not add up to what adequate GPG provision requires. Thus, problems of underprovision persist, even if they clearly pose serious systemic risks.

A reason for this situation appears to lie in the global normative framework, especially in the inconsistencies between: (1) the ambitious goals that, given the lengthening list of unmet global challenges, the international community decided to meet by defined target dates; and (2) the still prevalent strict interpretation of sovereignty, owing to which international cooperation is often seen as entailing a loss of state sovereignty even if the issue at stake is an interdependence-entailing GPG and, thus, a problem that no state or nonstate actor alone is able to resolve and that cannot be resolved either, if individual

actors address it only to the extent that their particular individual interests happen to overlap with global interests.

The conclusion emerging from this analysis and offered as a topic for further research and debate is that, if confronted with global policy concerns, individual actors, including governments today are often unsure about where their loyalty should lie: on the pursuit of narrowly defined self-interests or on promoting the realization of global goals, which may be more costly in the short-term but, in the longer-run, probably the better, more efficient and effective way to meet one's self-interests.

In order to make international cooperation more sovereignty-compatible and foster fuller compliance with international agreements, it might thus be important to promote more mutually beneficial bargains: to encourage compliance with or, put differently, loyalty to commitments undertaken through a global distribution of costs and benefits that all perceive as fair despite the fact that their policy preferences for a particular GPG or the type of corrective action to be taken may vary – as they do today and are likely to do in the foreseeable future, given the wide differences and disparities existing in the world.