

# Global Systems and Global Governance

## New A Level Subject Content Overview

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## Introduction

The rationale for the new 'global systems and global governance' section of the A Level Geography curriculum is as follows; to describe and explain how citizens, states and non-state actors make and re-make our contemporary world. It is both a timely and even urgent undertaking as political and civic leaders warn about impending climate change, fossil fuel dependency, worsening economic inequalities, and ongoing resource consumption, including fish, meat and water, of a world population approaching ten billion. The world community faces profound challenges but does so in the context of an international political system, which is predicated on the individual sovereign rights of nearly 200 states and their national territories.

The topic builds on GCSE studies on development and globalisation but introduces students to the geopolitical circumstances and contexts that affect how actors, state and non-state, influence and react to flows of people, money, ideas, technology, resources and 'extreme events' such as natural disasters, wars and recessions. At heart lies a tension between the apparently 'fixed' building blocks of the international system based on states and their claims to exclusive sovereignty and security with the mobile and fluid spaces and flows of human and non-human systems, which migrate and move across national borders, often with impunity. Whether it be the migration of people from North Africa to Southern Europe and/or the ebb and flow of global financial markets, states and governments can often struggle to regulate those mobile agents and objects.

This is not to say that states and non-state actors such as corporations and campaigning organizations are powerless. States and governments do exercise sovereign authority over their

territories and interests that extend beyond national boundaries. As the experience of the European Union suggests, governments will also 'pool sovereignty' when they think a more regional based approach to migration and economic planning warrants it. Corporations and business lobbies promotes policies and practices that are conducive to their interests and to those of shareholders. Campaigning organizations also lobby, organize and protest in national capitals and communities, as well as forge trans-national associations where it makes strategic sense to do so.

The focus on global systems and global governance encourages students to think of the world being made and remade by ideas, agents, objects and practices; and being made and remade in sites and spaces around the world. Terms like 'global systems' can seem quite abstract and remote to the ordinary citizen. Global governance might seem something the rich, the privileged and the powerful do. But geographers would insist that global systems and global governance occurs in places and is part of all our everyday lives and not something that *just* occurs in the World Economic Forum in Davos, the day to day activities of financial centres such as the City of London and the diplomatic business of the United Nations (UN) in New York.

We, as citizens, are enrolled in these global systems and global governance; sometimes in quite subtle ways and sometimes not. For an Iraqi and an Syrian refugee, global systems and global governance might take on a different meaning compared to a British resident or a European Union migrant working in the UK. The apparent failure of the 'international community' to intervene in the ongoing civil war/regional conflict affecting Syria and Iraq might lead to scepticism about how coherent and organized the global system is. For the EU migrant working in the UK, the European Union directives about labour mobility contribute to a regional framework of governance, underpinned by European Convention on Human Rights that creates a common legal space for over 800 million citizens extending from Ireland to Russia and Ukraine.

### **Key Geographical Concepts**

The two key geographical concepts are *interdependence* and *inequality*, and the manner in which they manifest themselves in sites and spaces around the world. The first, interdependence, refers to recognition that our world is not in reality composed of nation-states operating in an international system, with a clear-cut distinction between the domestic political life of states and the international arena. While states and governments may continue to commit themselves to protecting 'their jobs', promoting 'their economies' and securing 'their boundaries', the reality of the situation is rather more complex. If we consider, for example, national security one might think that this was something that states and governments guard jealously and would be reluctant to share even

acknowledge that they did not enjoy exclusive control over such matters. In reality, even a military superpower such as the United States illustrates internal and external interdependence. Internally, the growth of private military contractors in places like Afghanistan and Iraq illustrates how the United States (U.S.) government sought to outsource some security matters to others. The rationale was partly cost saving but also risk avoidance; considering it better politically to ask others to protect and defend key installations and interests. Externally, the U.S. and other states regularly collaborate and share in areas such as military intelligence, training, border security, joint missions and technology transfer. The world of national security is invariably trans-national and highly interdependent even for the largest military powers.

Beyond security, interdependence has an even broader purchase in contemporary debates affecting the United Nations and its post-2015 UN Development Agenda – which demands that further progress is made on the Millennium Development Goals including eradicating poverty, tackling climate change, and empowering women. Interdependence in this context means recognising that global governance is struggling to keep up with the pace and extent of economic globalisation, capital and trade flows, illegal and legal migration of people, technological change including the development and expansion of the web and ‘big data’, and intensification of resource exploitation in territories that are described as areas beyond national jurisdiction (Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) or the global commons). UN agencies recognize that it is essential that there are not only ‘rules and regulations’ governing their use but that there are mechanisms in place to monitor and enforce. This might apply not just to ABNJ such as the deep seabed and the high seas but also to human rights protection, where nation-states either lack the authority and competence to act or are unwilling to do so.

Ideas and practices regarding global systems and global governance are not necessarily shared either. While states and governments might sign up to international agreements, their commitment to respect and enforce the contents of those agreements varies. For example, there exists a plethora of regional and global bodies and conventions addressing illegal fishing in the high seas areas of the world. There is no shortage of legal and political architecture but this has not stopped signatories to those agreements flouting and or ignoring abuses to fisheries conservation and management. While progress has been made in remote areas such as the Southern Ocean, there is no agreement at present as to whether these areas need further maritime protection areas or not. Countries with substantial fishing interests tend to oppose further restraints on what they see as areas of legitimate business interest in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and they are suspicious of others actors, state and non-state, who promote sustainable and conservation-based agendas. Even if fisheries experts advocate precaution and restraint, global fisheries governance is tainted by suspicion and mistrust. This could worsen as pressures on resources grow.

UN agencies are demanding a new global partnership to promote effective governance in a world of accelerating and intensifying interdependence and resource consumption. One barrier to such a global partnership is *inequality*. States, citizens, and non-state actors ranging from corporations to international agencies such as the UN Economic and Social Council enjoy different levels of authority and competence. Some actors and interests appear to be more dominant than others. This can manifest itself in at least two ways – imaginatively and materially. Using terms such as imaginative geographies, leading geographers - such as David Harvey and Derek Gregory - have addressed how our world is organized and divided. For the last three decades, the political-economic ideology of neo-liberalism has made and remade the world in distinct ways with due emphasis given to the role of markets rather than states and agencies to allocate and promote trade and capital flows. There is, imaginatively, an inequality of ideas about how the world should work. Political leaders who do not support this neo-liberal mind-set are very few in number, and when alternative ideas and political parties do emerge they attract media and political interest because they appear exceptional (e.g. Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece).

What that means in effect is that governments around the world have been urged to encourage capital flows and market expansion, but with mixed results. Some states and governments have been better able than others to negotiate transnational capital flows and opportunities for business. Even within nominally 'powerful states' such as the United States, the everyday lives of citizens and migrants vary greatly depending on class, race, gender and nationality registers. The onset of global recession in 2007-8, coupled with continued austerity policies in many countries around the world, has brought to further public attention inequalities of access to essential goods and services. Public strikes and protests around the world have grown and these have been highly geographical as anti-austerity protestors occupy and demonstrate in public places in capital cities. In the UK, between October 2011 and June 2012, the Occupy movement set up a protest camp outside the iconic St Paul's Cathedral in the heart of the City of London in order to highlight their anger at the impact of recession and austerity on ordinary citizens in the UK and around the world.

'We are the 99%' became a familiar chant for many protestors, as opposition grew against a hyper-privileged elite 1% who stood accused of accruing wealth and power. While the Occupy movement garnered considerable media attention at the time (especially between 2011 and 2012), arguably higher profile international events and circumstances (e.g. Iraq/Syria, Ukraine/Crimea) have acted to deflect attention away from that anti-austerity agenda. Moreover, for all the criticism directed at neo-liberalism, there is evidence of growing middle classes in the global South and historically low oil prices are lowering food and fuel costs for many across the world. This does not undermine the claims of those that speak of a divided and unequal world rather it shows that

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support and solidarities can operate in a myriad of ways – some of which is supportive of the current global system and some of which is not.

### **Core Content of ALCAB Report**

The ALCAB report pertaining to global systems and global governance sets out the rationale, scope and suggested case studies. Global systems include the environmental, political, legal, economic, financial, and cultural systems that help to make and remake the world. These include on the one hand the world trading system (including an examination of iconic objects such as the shipping container e.g. see Birtchnell et al 2015) and on the other hand the environmental systems that regulate the earth's weather, oceanic currents, and ecosystems. Global systems are more than simply human creations but better thought of as more than human interventions and manifestations.

Global governance refers to the rules, norms and laws that make and remake global systems and the geographical consequences for citizens, ecosystems and human and physical environments in different places. Rules refer to standards for activities, norms refer to expectations about what is considered to be 'normal and reasonable', and laws refer to obligations and duties on signatories. What makes global governance a complex affair is that even parties nominally signed up and committed to global governance systems can and do differ on how they interpret, engage and enforce rules, norms and laws. This can have important consequences for human and different environments in areas such as human rights protection and conservation management.

The sub-themes of global interdependence and inequality are introduced. Emphasis is placed on introducing students to the existence of an interdependent and unequal world. Interdependence focuses on the relationships that are created and sustained by systems of governance. Manifestations of interdependence may be recognised, may be celebrated, may be denied and may even be despised. Interdependence varies in scope and intensity as well as recognition; for example here in the UK we might give barely a second thought to the systems necessarily to produce, transport and eventually place electronic goods in their high street shops and out of town shopping centres. Sometimes extreme events can remind us how fragile our interdependence can be such as a volcanic eruption in Iceland in April 2010, which had the effect of grounding international air traffic and thus disrupting not just flows of people but also perishable goods destined for European and North American markets.

The second sub-theme of inequality supplements interdependence because it recognises that the world is shaped in unequal ways. Some states and some actors such as large corporations have

far greater capacity to drive global systems or even take advantage of them for their own particular interests. One striking example might be organised crime and criminal drug cartels in places like Mexico, which have the capacity to bribe, intimidate and murder citizens and government officials alike while using global financial markets to move money, to invest money and to spend money in and beyond Mexico.

Both sub-themes allow teachers and students to think about how geographical scale and the capacities of local, national and global actors vary across space.

### **Case Studies for Global Systems and Global Governance**

*Global systems* can be addressed in a variety of ways, depending on the selected topic and its associated geographical scale and extent. With the sub-themes of interdependence and inequality in mind, students should select one of the following topics:

- *Access to markets for goods, services and capital in the contemporary world.* Key questions include: How does the world trade system promote, regulate and or secure access to markets around the world? Are some states and corporations better able to challenge barriers and impediments to 'free trade'? Do campaigns and demands for 'free trade' represent a challenge to the world trade system or merely tinkering to an existing system, which is regulated by bodies such as the World Trade System? Case study might include the fair trade coffee campaign.
- *Human development and life expectancy.* Key questions include: Do differences in human development indices tell us something important about how the world is organised and regulated? Are there complex geographies of life expectancy that in turn complicate our understanding of the world being divided between a rich global North and a poor global South? Is one of the greatest challenges facing the world today the global treatment of disease and childhood mortality? Case study might include tracking the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and the UN post-2015 Development Agenda.
- *Population Movement and Immigration Control.* Key questions include: What rights, norms and laws exist governing and regulating the movement of people? Are there citizens in some parts of the world that enjoy far-greater visa-free travel than others? What needs to be done to better protect migrants and their families in host countries and communities? Case study might include investigating the treatment of migrant communities within the European Union or in other places such as South Africa, which has experienced a wave of xenophobic attacks against people perceived to be foreigners.

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*Global governance* can be addressed in a variety of ways, and the idea is to show students how the world is structured through systems and rules. Many of which have been responsible for enormous progress in human affairs, especially in human rights protection and economic and social welfare. Post-1945, the development of the United Nations and the expansion of international law has been an essential, even if its application and efficacy has varied geographically. The sub-themes of interdependence and inequality ask students to think about variability through these possible topics:

- *The governance of the global commons* (or areas beyond national jurisdiction). Key questions include: What are the global commons and do they include contested spaces such as Antarctica? Does the global system acknowledge the interests of states and non-state actors in these areas such as the high seas and atmosphere? Are there growing pressures on the exploitation of the global commons? Case study might include Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, and consider how fishing and even longer-term mineral exploitation sits uneasily with efforts to promote resource conservation and environmental protection. The work of the Commission to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) would be relevant.
- *Human rights protection and the geopolitics of intervention*. Key questions include: What international legal protections exist regarding human rights and genocide? Should the international community be selective when it comes to intervening or not intervening in international crises? How does geopolitical circumstances and context influence the decision to protect vulnerable citizens? Case study might include the Syrian crisis and/or the 1994 Rwanda genocide.
- *Sovereignty and territorial integrity*. Key questions include: What role does the UN Charter play in recognising the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states? Should sovereignty and national borders be considered contingent if states lack the authority to manage their own affairs? Can others create a new state and violate the territorial integrity of an existing state if there is a desire to self-determine their future? Case study might include the emergence and independence of South Sudan in 2011 and/or the current fate of Iraq which is divided into three parts – an autonomous Kurdish region, an ISIS controlled trans-national region and an Iraqi government controlled sector.



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<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~reecej/Johnson%20et%20al%202011%20Political%20Geography.pdf>

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx>

United Nations Environment Program on Global Commons Available at:

<http://www.unep.org/delc/GlobalCommons/tabid/54404/>

UN Resource on the 1994 Rwanda Genocide Available at:

<http://www.un.org/events/rwanda/resources.shtml>

UN System Task Team (2013) Global Governance and Governance of the Global Commons in the Global Partnership for Development post-2015 available at:

[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam\\_undf/thinkpieces/24\\_thinkpiece\\_global\\_governance.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/thinkpieces/24_thinkpiece_global_governance.pdf)

World Trade Organization official portal Available at:

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