

Notes on Module 8: Non-Governmental Organizations and State Power

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Module 8 discusses “governance” and the role of non-state actors (Non-Governmental Organizations – NGOs): specifically, how NGOs and governments might work together to complement one another. In the United States context, we can better understand NGOs if we compare them to Non-Profit Organizations whose objective is to help uplift the lives of fellow global citizens. Examples would include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Clinton Foundation and the Carter Center. NGOs are often seen as ‘filling’ the space between the sovereignty of the Nation State and the fulfilment by the Nation State of its state responsibilities. The point that I want to make is that NGOs are not always ‘bottom up organizations’ or organizations established solely by civil society. In this global village, we should not always assume that NGOs invariably do ‘good’ or ‘bad’ things; or that they are always welcome in the spheres or foreign countries in which they work! Governments are also sometimes in the business of “creating” NGOs that push their (the foreign or local government’s) agenda. While most NGOs are well-meaning, some governments sometimes ‘sponsor’ NGOs in foreign countries to use as policy tools – perhaps a carry-over from the Cold War! It is not uncommon for some countries, particularly in the developing world, to accuse what they see as foreign-funded NGOs, of ‘meddling’ in their internal affairs.

Definition of State

Module 8 Discussion also covers “state power” in relation to changes (increasing, decreasing, shifting, diffusing of power) in a “world in which 13 of the top 50 economies are companies, not countries,” and the proliferation of “nongovernmental organizations.” Here in the United States, we can “forgive” ourselves as to what we understand by the term “state.” ***When we read or hear about states, we immediately think of “the 50 states” of the United States of America. This is not what is meant by “state” in the global context.*** In international relations (and in this course), “state” means country. The United States is a “state,” just like Germany or Lesotho.

The changes in state power refer to changes within the state/country – not in the international context. We are asked to consider issues like: If multinational corporations happen to “control” some national governments – how does that impact actions intended to find solutions to global issues? Moreover, while states (countries) are supposed to generally work for the good of citizens; **multinationals** are concerned mostly with profits for their shareholders!