The rationale of this volume is to show that neither the „statist“ nor the „functional“ approaches to understanding global governance are adequate. In the introductory chapter the editors outline their critique and advance their own approach which focuses „on the agents who govern“ (p. XIII). They call these agents „global governors“, including people as agents (for example judges at International Criminal Courts) and institutions/organizations (for example IMF or Exxon) as agencies. They assume (1) that it is the relationships between the governors and the governed and the relationships between the governors which constitute the basic building blocks of global governance. They contend (2) that the core of these relations are „authority relationships“ (p. 8). And they assert that it is not the type of actor but the character of these relationships „that is key to understanding global politics“ (p. 3).

The book then offers eleven case studies, five of which examine global governance dynamics as they affect the critical resource of authority and the following six dealing with governance outcomes as modeled by conflict, tension and synergies. In their own accounts of the case studies the editors honestly reflect the uniqueness of each case which is interdicting any generalizations. Governors, it seems, do exactly what other political actors have been doing for centuries, that is strategizing, competing, cooperating, trying to achieve their goals and enhance their resources. Not very surprisingly, „sometimes they succeed; sometimes they fail“ (p. 25).

In a final chapter, the editors wrap up the insights and lessons learnt from the eleven case studies. They reiterate the usefulness of their definition of governors as „authorities who exercise power across borders for the purpose of affecting policy“ (p. 356) and they restate that is not just states which govern but, as the case studies show, „professions, corporations, advocacy groups and others“ (p. 357).

Of course, this is not a new insight in global governance studies, so the question is what is innovative, and what is missing in this book.

Innovative is a clear focus on „governors“ as actors and on the conditions under which governors create, consolidate and share their authority. The case studies offer useful and in some cases excellent empirical evidence for the intricacies and convolutions of „governing“ in a global context. This short review cannot deal with all eleven case studies, but a few highlights should be mentioned: Charli Carpenter’s study on gatekeepers and issue adoption within global advocacy networks, Tamar Gutner’s insightful analysis of the relation between IMF and the Millennium Development Goals, and Karen Mundy’s concise review of the changing relationships between the relevant actors in the policy arena of global primary education.

The focus on actors, of course, is a very narrow view. Almost by necessity it misses the broader context of political-economic constraints which cannot be disregarded by simply denigrating a „structural“ view. For traditional democracies, that is, for most of the thirty OECD-countries, the question of political economy is acquiring a crucial importance regarding the future of democracy. The point here is not that these democracies are endangered or fragile. Rather, they are threatened by an insidiously creeping irrelevance of politics and democracy for determining societal affairs. In many of these countries voter turnout has dropped below fifty percent, political campaigns and elections have become exercises in mass marketing resembling the selling of detergents, and voters begin to realize that the really important issues are determined elsewhere. So, the reasons why private and corporate „governors“ become more important certainly have to do with systemic and institutional changes in the setup of national and transnational policies.

In this respect the global financial crisis has brought about a surprising turn-around. All of a sudden national governments and national politics have resurged as „strong states“ and saviors of last resort, bringing liquidity, order and stability back into a severely troubled economy and financial system. It might
have been a Pyrrhic victory, however, not only over-extending the financial means of the respective countries but also insinuating governance capabilities which in reality do not exist. The hasty and uncoordinated crisis management of the global down-turn has created a host of Potemkin villages (of different shape in different countries), and now the job for politics is to explain to a gawking public that the villages contain neither houses nor infrastructure but still carry costly mortgages for generations to come.

Similarly, governance restraint of (nationally organized and democratic) governments implies to take into consideration the limits of their powers and their need to collaborate with a variety of transnational and global actors, organizations and institutions. It is a classical paradox: National governments have to restrain their ambitions in order to be able to accomplish ambitious goals, and they have to restrain their power in order to gain more influence. Indeed, as the editors observe, the emergence of non-state actors does not normally mean a shrinking of the power of states – „it may enhance state power“ (p. 357).

Self-restraint increases complexity and reduces transparency of democratic processes and thus adds to the ingredients of ungovernability of modern democracies. At the same time, governance restraint is opening new opportunities for global policy networks, international NGOs, collaborative institutions like WTO or IMF and prospective new forms of configuring global governance regimes which retain a substantial role for national democracies.

First of all, contemporary advanced democracies need to develop and implement improved models of democracy for themselves. It seems to be their responsibility to improve their internal models of governance, to infuse resolve and resilience into their models of democracy, to empower the regimes of transnational cooperation and global governance, and to reconfigure their roles as democratic nation-states in the context of complex sovereignty and complex global policy networks.

In a seemingly paradoxical turn general participation and engagement in civil society and community affairs is declining, engendering fears of a declining ability of political parties to activate citizens’ support and voter turnout, while at the same time involvement and civil society activities in special and specific causes is expanding, broadening the specter of organizations and associations voicing interests and influencing public opinion. Political parties are caught in the dilemma of having to present themselves as broad „middle-of-the-road“ parties in order to attract large groups of voters and to attain majorities in legislatives, while being exposed to exceedingly specialized and sophisticated demands from small causes and fragmented constituencies. New opportunities to exercise influence and considerable stakes in the political game give rise to new actors in interest aggregation. They are changing the configuration of collective will formation from classical governmental politics to governance.

Insofar, new actors and „governors“ indeed will enter the stage of global governance. Whether this will improve the overall quality of governance or whether it augments the variety and complexity of private authority and single issue advocacy remains to be seen. Therefore, the question „Who governs the globe?“ remains open – but the book is an excellent guide for understanding the problems and intricacies implied.