

Special Issue on The multiplex age: pluralism and connectivity beyond multipolarity

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The concept of “multiplexity” has recently garnered attention as a lens onto complex and cross-cutting, if not necessarily competing, international orders and globalisms. Against traditional models of unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity, multiplexity alerts us to the plurality of actors and forces in the contemporary world—including international and regional institutions, corporations and banks, social movements and activists, criminal gangs and terrorist networks. The proliferating empirical descriptions of multiplexity demand a systematic examination of its analytic possibilities and limitations. By critically assessing the ontological, epistemological, and analytical potential of multiplexity, this panel assembles papers for a Special Issue that will serve as a key reference point for students of planetary politics, international relations, and global development as these fields have unfolded over the last decade.

By shifting the terms of discourse away from Eurocentric—and great power-centric—models of multipolarity, as well as Western-centric notions of “liberal international order,” the conceptual tool of multiplexity can help us to anchor an otherwise decentered conversation between experts with diverse regional and thematic expertise towards relational learning across perspectives.

Contributors to the SI contend that a plurality of actors across diverse states and societies, influence international affairs today. Economic interdependence is denser than it has ever been, entailing proliferating forms of trade and finance, infrastructures, and supply chains. More people than ever before are crossing national boundaries, and digital technologies have enabled the formation of transnational networks hitherto unthinkable. New actors, especially in the global South, are asserting their agency in shaping international affairs, addressing global challenges posed by such processes as climate change, human trafficking, and pandemics. These realities compel analysts to confront dominant Eurocentric narratives of world order, while avoiding the temptation to replace these with, say, Sino-centric, Indo-centric or Afro-centric perspectives.

Track Classification: Global Politics and Development