
CONTEMPORARY GLOBALIZATION AND POLITY TRANSFORMATION

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The term 'polity' refers to a social configuration, of which state is but a part. The contemporary wave of globalization led by information and communication technologies is forcing a transformation in the nation-state based polity. The states as a collective entity are not immune from the profound impacts of information technologies that have transformed the world inhabitants into a single community through intensified connectivity, facilitating the instant exchange and dissemination of information across the world. The present research aims at revealing various dynamics of the transformation of polity, predicting the consequences with concrete and open manifestations of the changing 'polity' in the real world settings. Relying on interpretivist approach, the article highlights the dynamics and consequences of the transformation of polity grounded in existing research. It also presents a theoretical model to comprehend this transformation and the emergence of global polity.

Keywords: *information and communication technologies, new public sphere, globalization, polity.*

1. Introduction

A polity generally refers to a 'form of politically organized unit'. The term is interchangeably used for both 'state' and 'government' in various contexts. In his *Politics*, Aristotle used this term to refer to a regime or rule. A regime itself refers to norms, principles and procedures (Krasner 1983), which help form a socio-political whole consisting of various components. A regime determines an association among these components and the basic norms that govern these relationships. 'Power' remains the central concern in this relationship. The norms and principles of a polity guarantee a responsible exercise of power (Bruyn 2005). Therefore, 'a polity' does not essentially mean 'a state', rather it refers to a social formation, a larger social whole of which 'a state' is but a part, accompanied by other actors of this power formation. The 'state' refers to a political society/sphere (Gramsci 1971), distinct from market and family – the realm of private. 'Civil society' lies between the two and mediates on behalf of the citizens with 'state' and 'market'. Market, though being a part of the private realm, has a capacity to exploit the public by allying with the state (Lipschutz 2007). 'Public sphere' facilitates civil society for this mediation by providing a powerful medium (Habermas 1974) and completes the social whole. Hence, the three overlapping structures of power shape a coherent whole that may be termed as a nation-state polity. These three institutions are 'state', 'civil society' and 'public sphere'.

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History shows that 'state' emerged in a certain historical period because it provided the best solutions for then prevalent issues (Beaulac 2004). Travelling back into the history, the temporal and spatial dynamics for the rise of state becomes clear (Ferguson 2006). The state reestablished peace both internally and externally, supported growing market, founded a consistent system of law and justice, and provided an alternative loyalty to the ethnic and religious split in Europe at that time (Mossberger *et al.* 2007).

The public sphere is a key element of sociopolitical organization. It is the arena which offers people an opportunity to come together as citizens and express their own opinions to influence the political theories and practices in the society (Habermas 1974). The civil society is an organized expression of these views, and the relationship between the state and civil society is the basis of democracy (O'Brien 1999). Society emerges as a correlate of the state, in other words, it appears as a limit to state/government and as an entity to which the public authorities have to attend (Foucault 2007: 349). Civil society keeps state attached with its subject by structuring and channeling public debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests (Castells 2008).

Over the last two centuries, the state sustained as the most powerful element of polity at the domestic as well as international level (Waltz 1979). This typical European polity model was superimposed in other civilizations over other types of polities, identities, as well as loyalties (Ferguson 2006). However, the current wave of information-led globalization has a deep impact on the nation-state based polity (Khan *et al.* 2012).

The means of communication have always played an important role in the evolution of civilization and globalization, as they provided the exchanges across nations and boundaries (McNeil 1998; Denmark 2000). The cross-border exchanges in science, technology and culture have generally promoted the development of civilization and globalization for certain material and cultural ends. The drivers for exchanges such as technologies, aspirations and communications have been important determinants of global history in the past and can play a similar role in the future (Tehrani 2004).

The information-based civilization has risen from the traditional industrial societies (Tehrani 1990). Different terms have been used to signify it like 'post-industrial', 'information', 'knowledge', 'postmodern' and 'network' society. Modern communication technologies provide variety of powerful and affordable communication tools and services. Social media is increasingly becoming an inevitable global tool for civil society (Hovland 2005). Since the public launching of the Internet in the 1990s, the number of its users has risen from millions to billions (Crack 2007). The information and communication technologies have made the world virtually borderless (Chanda 2008: 123). These technologies have attracted diverse users: regular citizens, activists, nongovernmental organizations, telecommunications firms, software providers, governments, *etc.* (Shirky 2011).

These diverse dynamics causes transformation in the territory-based polity. The power structures are shifting from domestic to transnational levels (Sassen 1996). In this perspective, some of the scholars contend that power is moving away from the state to different non-state actors (Held *et al.* 1999).

2. The Nation-State Based Polity and Globalization

Although globalization is not a pure political process, however, it transforms the political basis of the world order (Clark 1999). Globalization accelerates political processes

and sensitizes everybody to their consequences. By means of swift communication, information flows and exchanges, globalization shapes a new environment to operate (Kapitonenko 2009). Globalization implies the existence of a single socio-political space on a global scale, which is shaped by the gradual decline in significance of boundaries due to the increasing exchanges across boundaries through the enhanced interconnectedness between societies, otherwise territorially bounded and different (Bartelton 2009; Acosta and González 2010).

The concept of geography is changing; today it is more a matter of association and connectivity than of space (Latour 1993). Similarly, 'globalization' is more than simply internationalization as it involves a new quality of social arrangements (Held 2003). Global flows of individuals, goods, information and capital have produced a qualitative shift from the systems of states to a novel world that has no concerns about the distinction between domestic and international realms (Luke 1993; Ferguson 2006; Ferguson and Mansbach 2004). The bagginess of the globalized world itself accelerates the dissolution of both bounded and autonomous nation-states, territorial geopolitical units and their identities (Khan, Gillani, and Navaz 2011).

The contemporary global polity resembles a complex structure in which decision making centers are dispersed between and concentrated on several layers of political order as they are dispersed and concentrated spatially, and some regions play more important role than others (Katzenstein 2005). Nation-state potentials for collective decision making as its primary function have become to some extent detached from its institutional structures within and between nation-states, and have been repositioned in the transnational level where they have been institutionally transformed or even reshaped in new institutional designs (Albert 2007).

Even social movements and groups that work for national issues try to go beyond the nation-state, to link up with like-minded groups (Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International) in other countries, or their global umbrella organizations, to address demands not simply to their own governments but also to foreign governments and international organizations (Kaldor 2007). Globalization is shaping a platform for the transformations in the functions/status of states in the world politics. However, by swaying internal political and social systems, it damages the state's sovereignty in international affairs (Kapitonenko 2009). Thus, the foremost character of 'state' in nation-state based polity has been challenged, giving way to redefinition of power players at all levels.

3. Dynamics of the Polity Transformation

At present, one can observe globalized human activities ranging from economic transactions, politics and culture to warfare. These activities flow across the traditional barriers of state, shaping a new world defined by Paul Friedman as a flat world (Friedman 2005). Globalization is not superimposed on the society, individuals, networks and civil society, instead it is shaped by individuals and groups every day everywhere (Drache 2008). The transformation of polity has been brought about due to a number of factors.

3.1. Globalization

Globalization is a dynamic process which characterizes a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions thereby generating transcontinental or inter-regional flows and networks of interaction and exercise of power (Held *et al.* 1999: 16). The prominent attributes of globalization are its social foundations, economic and po-

litical dimensions, and its capacities for integrating a range of so far nationally demarcated activities across state boundaries (Beeson 2003). The transitions in the mode of production of hunting and gathering societies to agrarian, commercial, manufacturing and information societies are rather well known. Each transition involved substantial transformations in the political, economic, and social systems (Tehrani 2004).

The current transformations shaped by globalization do not denote the end of politics rather it is resituating it somewhere else (Toffler 1991). The national or international dualism no more determines the structure of prospects for political activities instead it is now situated in the 'global' platform. Global politics have become global domestic politics, which deprive national politics of their boundaries and grounds (Beck 2006: 249). This process structures a social system with the functional potential to work as a unit globally in real or chosen time. Capacity here refers to technological, institutional (*i.e.* deregulation, liberalization, and privatization), and organizational capacity (Castells 2008).

3.2. Eroding State Sovereignty

Seemingly, the deterioration of state power has stimulated the 'diffusion of authority away from national governments and produced the problems of non-authority and un-governance' (Strange 1996: 14). The erosion of state sovereignty is shaped by internal social developments, growth of new ideologies and the emergence of non-state actors at various levels (Kreijen 2002). The erosion of sovereignty is generally considered as a consequence of globalization (Beeson 2003). The problems of sovereignty and national security have emerged as critical concerns for the whole world (Chanda 2008; Grinin 2012). Globalization supplies a new perspective for these developments thereby making the state-centered foreign policy subservient to global trends (Kapitonenko 2009).

The problems of globalization are unique in the sense that those states that have the most developed economies and are supposed to be the leaders of globalization are actually fostering a system that can be dangerous for the sovereignty of their own state (Strange 1996). This is the most colossal change in the world order setting since the Westphalia Treaty of 1648. This treaty helped sovereign states become the core elements of the international system (Jackson and Owens 2005). They replaced a number of international actors like the Pope, the Emperor, dynasties, and the like. Therefore, starting from the mid-17th century, international relations have been primarily dominated by the states but this era of history appears to be nearly over (Khan *et al.* 2012).

3.3. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

ICT refers to certain machines or equipments (like computers, software and satellites), infrastructures (like cables and networks) and related systems that facilitate access for users, analyze, generate, share and utilize data, information, and knowledge in extraordinary ways. Though the 'ICT' and the 'Internet' are different terms, however, they are sometimes interchangeable (Beebe 2004). ICTs can be better understood in the context of shaping a new set of associations and spaces, an agora rather than as a high-tech tool. It is a new global arena for competition over the distribution of resources, information and the power (Van Dijk 2006).

Modern technologies do not just supply information but also offer tools that can extend the role of the citizens in the social and political arena. The abrupt growth of online political groups and activism clearly demonstrate the political use of the internet

(Bowen 1996; Browning 1996). The internet and related technologies by their character can multiply prospects for self-expression and facilitate civic activities (Castells 2008). The integrative features of ICTs raise connectivity and accessibility (Kleinberg 2008). ICTs by enabling a horizontal network of global communication supply a number of tools for organizing and conducting public debates and have the capacity to raise collective decision making (Nawaz 2012).

ICTs have provided new opportunities for governance (for both conventional and e-governance) but on the other side, these have augmented the capacities of civil society by enabling vibrant and extensive public sphere (Dahlgren 2005) and thus support a transformation of polity (Crack 2007; Castells 2008). ICTs facilitate political actions with complete disregard to territory, and foster public spheres and fresh social movements (Min 2010).

Since its advent, the Internet has grown to become a major center of entertainment, education, and community (Bartle 2006: 31) and it has many prospects for business, research and politics (Balkin and Noveck 2006). ICTs can assist bridging the trust gap among the nations by information exchange facilities and thus, have the capacity to ameliorate misperception and, eventually bring more security, harmony and less violence (Kapitonenko 2009). These characteristics of ICTs reflect its social, political and economic impacts.

3.4. Emergence of Transnational Businesses

The contemporary developments in modern technologies along with the policies of free market across the world have facilitated intense economic interdependence (Stopford 1998), and the subsequent externalities resulted in the emergence of non-state actors of global character like TNCs or MNCs. TNCs have gradually become the symbols of new power structures in the global economy. These corporate institutions work across state borders to materialize their own interests and not of the state of their origin (Kapitonenko 2009). For some they are hard-nosed exploiters, but for others – the torchbearers of prosperity (Mazlish 2012).

These corporations have developed global networks of production and marketing that have transformed economic geography (Dicken 2003). Traders, preachers, adventurers, and warriors have always linked dispersed human communities and civilizations, and facilitated the rise of the interconnected society that we now call ‘globalized’ (Chanda 2008).

The rise of TNCs poses a threat to the traditional understanding that international politics is shaped by states within the formal Westphalian state system (Deibert 1997). Furthermore, they blur the distinction between the domestic and the international, challenge the idea of ‘state’ as the eventual authority at home, and decrease the importance of access to territory (Kobrin 2001). TNCs are the major cause and consequence of globalization (Mazlish 2012) and as a result major driver of transformation of polity.

3.5. The Emergence of Mundane Issues

The enhanced connectivity, interdependence of societies and states, and unprecedented production of commodities have given birth to various mundane issues – ranging from sociopolitical and economic issues to biological and environmental issues (Crack 2007). The state seems incompetent to deal with issues like climate change, global terrorism, *etc.* The decreasing capacities of the state have led to the involvement of non-

state actors for resolving these challenges. Furthermore, this also depicts a gulf between the spaces where these novel issues emerge (global) and the spheres of power where these issues are dealt with (nation-state). This also provides the rationale for the transformation of polity from nation-state (local) to global realm (Castells 2008).

4. The Emerging Global Polity

The information technology driven globalization has drastically influenced the nation-state based polity amounting to a transformation. This transformation has shifted the centers of power from local to global level, and has been encouraging the redefinition of the terms of interaction among the constituent elements of the new polity. It can be contended that 'state' capacity to deal with the current issues has deteriorated and that the new actors have come forward to fill the gap (Kobrin 2001). The civil society and public sphere, which were relatively weaker elements of nation-state based polity, have now become more powerful and have extended beyond the nation-state realm (Kapitonenko 2009; Khan *et al.* 2011b).

So at the global level the rising political structure reflects three major components. A new public sphere (NPS) which is transnational in nature and is anchored around global communication networks. The second component of this political structure is the 'global' civil society which is an organized manifestation of norms, values and interests of the global society (Keane 2003). A network state is the third component of the global polity which is reflected in the emerging global governance structures (Castells 2008). Fig. 1 presents the theoretical model of the polity transformation.

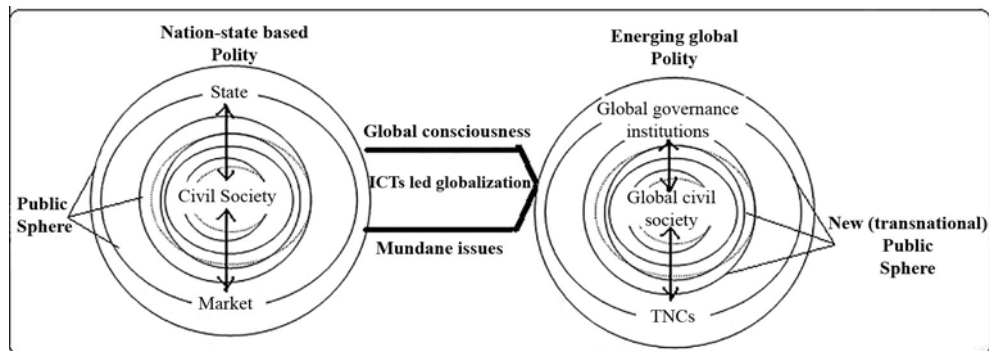


Fig. 1. Theoretical model of the polity transformation

4.1. Global Civil Society

Civil society is generally considered as a domain of social belief and action, separate from politics and economy. This domain consists of individuals, families, groups, movements and organizations beyond the grasp of the state-authority and selfishness of the market (Lipschutz 2007). The voluntary realm and the public sphere of discourse are shifting from the mass-media to interactive web-sites (Castells 2008). Most appropriate to the global perspective, the networks can shape social associations without the constraints of space or co-presence (Khan, Nawaz *et al.* 2011).

Civil societies have generally been defined at the level of nation-state where group identity emerges from citizenship in a territorial state (Schwartz 2003). However, today, the transnational networks are facilitating civic engagements across the borders of terri-

torial state. This shows that shared interests can also play the role of binding agent like shared geography or identity (Khan *et al.* 2012).

The contemporary civil society is the arena where an individual negotiates a social contract not only with the state but also with layers of institutions at the local, national, regional and global levels. Moreover, it is not just an arena made of progressive cosmopolitan ideas; it also includes national and religious militants, corporate lobby groups and a multiplicity of opinions (Keane 2003). Many people term this transnational version of civil society as a global civil society which mediates with state, global governance structures and corporations for progressive ends (Kaldor 2007).

4.2. Global Public Sphere

Prima facie, a shift seems to occur from a public sphere constituted around the national institutions of territory-based societies to a public sphere anchored around the transnational media system (El-Nawawy and Iskander 2002; Paterson and Sreberny 2004). The contemporary media comprises both the traditional media like TV, radio, and the print media, and a diversity of modern multimedia and communication systems like the Internet and horizontal networks (Dahlgren 2005; Tremayne 2007; Bennett 2008). The new public sphere is a multi-discursive political space, a global sphere of mediation, with no center or periphery. The agenda setting and contexts are shaped and mediated by autonomously operating media systems (Castells 2008) and by the citizens themselves (Khan *et al.* 2012).

The international citizens due to their transnational activity facilitated by ICTs are shaping 'digital public'. The ICTs convert an ordinary citizen into an international one by providing him/her with the unlimited social possibility to innovate and form discursive communities of choice. Global activity is manifested in signing petitions, starting boycotts, creating art, breaking copyright laws, file-sharing, blogging, and engaging in elite challenging activities (Drache 2008: 63). These 'digital publics' are no longer confined to their self-constructed spaces. Instead they talk to one another, and are not afraid to voice their opinions (Khan, Nawaz *et al.* 2011).

It is well recognized that everything affects everything else and different campaigns do not compete, they rather reinforce each other (Neale 2002: 105). It is evident that information society is generating a new global consciousness, which is based on an increasing awareness of the global ecological and economic interdependence, clashes of culture and the dialogue needed for democracy (Tehrani 2004). In this age of communication the ordinary citizens are more informed than they used to be and demand more from the state, at a time when most states and their leaders are seemingly unable to provide (Ferguson 2006). Thus, the NPS with its revitalized 'publicness' provide the global civil society with the required medium to interact with the layers of political authorities (Castells 2008).

4.3. The Rise of Global Governance

A single global political authority is not visible at the global arena; however, there are millions of control mechanisms for the management of transnational policies (Rosenau 1995: 9). These mechanisms range from the primary to the embedded, from informal modes of consultation to formal decision-making arrangements. The planet is ordered according to certain rules, regimes, and norms that enjoy widespread legitimacy (Crack 2007). They cover a range of current issues, for example, climate change, struggle with terrorism and managing global economy. This rising institutionalism denotes a transition from national government to global governance (Khan *et al.* 2012).

The emergence of global governance correlates with the organizational shift from the mass society to a network society (Castells 1996). The state governments use the typical structural characteristics of a mass society where the authority is centralized in a hierarchical and vertically integrated bureaucracy. On the contrary, global governance networks are hierarchical and horizontally integrated. Some centers in the network are more influential than others because of their international legal status, legitimacy and resources (Crack 2007). Globalization is not a new phenomenon however, the efforts to govern the interconnections produced by it are not very old (Chanda 2008; Sloterdijk 2009: 33) and this is the reason for the immaturity of global governance institutions. Nevertheless, the relocation of state authorities in the global institutions is reflected in the increasingly emerging economic, political, security, and ecological institutions (Mazlish 2012).

5. Discussions

Many scholars have pointed to the fact that transformation in polity is initiated by material forces, seeking higher profits in the global space, and is supported by the rapid development of technologies in the field of communication, transportation, media and production (Wriston 1992). The primary characteristic of globalization is that geographical distance becomes irrelevant and that territorial boundaries become less significant (Scholte 2000). It is contentious whether the establishment of global governance institutions is also accompanied by the trends of formation of a polity at a global level (Khan, Gillani, and Navaz 2011).

Most theories of international relations still assume a nation-state context in which territorially bounded political societies interact in the absence of a centralized authority (Bartelson 2009). In order to make sense of contemporary global developments, the state-centric theories of international relations need to be abandoned in favor of a planetary or global vantage point (Bartelson 2010).

It can be argued that 'globality' is constituted by a rising common consciousness of the human society on a planetary scale through an increasing recognition of the human and social relations as the largest constitutive framework of all relations (Shaw 2000). Furthermore, there is growing awareness and consideration of the argument that globalization is not simply a bottom-up process leading to the emergence of global networks and structures that link preexistent institutions at sub-global levels: the concept of society on a global scale customarily implies that there is something like a planetary social whole in a meaningful analytical sense as well (Albert 2007).

The state is increasingly enfeebled today (Ferguson 2006). It finds itself bounded by competitors offering alternative rules and norms for global politics. The monopoly of state in international politics is over; interstate relations are turning into transnational realm. These transformations are marked by the notion of an increasing interdependence of various international actors, and globalization reinforces this interdependence (Kapitonenko 2009).

The global economic and cultural forces are increasingly becoming successful. Furthermore, the communication technologies such as the World Wide Web have contracted the world so closely that more than half of the top hundred economic entities have become more homogenous and more connected than ever before (Camilleri and Falk 1992). Thus, the rise of transnational actors and a global civil society have transformed the inter-state system and directly affected the construct of sovereignty (Deibert 1997). They have further distorted the line between the domestic and the international,

compromised the idea of states as the ultimate authority, limited the significance of access to territory, and raised questions about the significance of actors in the global system (Kobrin 2001).

Thus, the rise of new global sociopolitical realm, different from the Westphalian state system can be envisioned. It exists in transnational spatial formations, a new social whole fastened in norms and aspiration as well as institutional networks beyond the states (Ruggie 2004: 519). However, globalization has not led to the elimination of states; rather states are a product of globalization and actions of individuals and groups (Bayart 2008). Globalization is expected to create a situation when states will continue to coexist but with global forms of authority.

6. Conclusions

Owing to various factors the nation-state based polity is undergoing some transformation. The emerging polity manifests itself through the emerging novel institutions like global civil society, global public sphere and institutions of global governance. This does not necessarily mean the extension of nation-state based institutions and concepts into their global equivalents, rather that the 'globality' itself is a new social whole on the planetary scale.

The technology driven globalization is shaping an environment in which the state is losing its sovereignty and the eroded power is resettling in transnational realm. The state is getting enfeebled and opening prospects for transnational actors for its incapacities to address the novel issues of the 21st century. On the contrary, the civil society is getting stronger and expands beyond state borders. Information and communication technologies enabled the new public sphere to augment the powers of global civil society actors striving to establish networks of civic societies globally.

Certainly, like any community, the global community requires a uniform set of ethos as the base on which it agrees. Therefore, as the world gets globalized, there is a rising demand to widen the scope of a common ethical code. However, the current platforms and processes to deliberate on such issues are not very inclusive and democratic. Regarding the issues of human rights, democratic freedoms, ecological challenges, business ethics and warfare, there is a need to consider common global values and their translation into rules about enforcement and inspection. The philosophers, scholars, policy-makers and civil society actors need to ponder upon and research those issues.

Nevertheless, in the emerging global polity, political authorities at global level are far from clear. The need for effective global governance has appeared from the mundane issues and the ambiguous nature of emerging global institutions. Moreover, effective economic and political governance at planetary level requires the involvement of all stakeholders, that is of public and private sectors, civil society representatives, and international organizations. The technological and cultural exchanges have always promoted human civilization and its governance institutions. One may expect that ICTs enabled globalization would also facilitate the development of civilization and governance at the global level.

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