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Trends in Bureaucracy, Democracy, and Representation

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To understand how globalization affects fairness in public institutions, we need first of all to be clear about the way public institutions are organized. When I use this term, I am thinking not only of the bureaucratic apparatus employed in public administration, but of the control structures that, in a democracy, involve elected assemblies as the source of authority and control. When we conceptualize institutions as government agencies, we are looking at only part of a system.

To understand how globalization and fairness apply to these institutions, we need to visualize them as whole systems. Representative assemblies are as much an integral part of public institutions in a democracy as are its appointed officials. Officials, both elected and appointed, are actors in any system of democratic governance. Of course, the two are linked. We sometimes speak of “representative bureaucracy” referring to the inclusion of minority people in administration, but no bureaucracy can be assuredly representative unless its controlling legislative organs are also representative.

Democratic Paradigm

Globalization compels us to reassess our images of how democracy is constituted or ought to work. Starting at the local level, democratic forms of government evolved, in opposition to monarchic and aristocratic tyrannies, as a form of government based on consensus among all participating citizens. In the context of capitalist and imperialist expansion, bourgeois democracies evolved based on the premise that representative assemblies could govern on behalf of citizens, political expansion making direct democracy impossible. However, the expansion of states also made bureaucracy necessary. Governance in larger states was no longer feasible on the basis of volunteers as implementers of public policy. This generated tensions between the heads of governments and representative

assemblies leading to precarious accommodations, first in the format familiar to Americans where a popularly elected president jockeys precariously with an elected Congress, and later in the more stable form based on separation of the roles of head of state and head of government in which real executive power is exercised by a prime minister subject to removal by the assembly.

This paradigm evolved in the context of sedentary populations, typical of agricultural and industrial societies. It never worked in traditional nomadic societies, nor can it work in today's global society where organized groups, often based on the power of glocalizing forces, require recognition and can accept responsibility in concert with organized polities whose representative assemblies are elected by individualized citizens. We typically do not recognize intergovernmental organizations (unions) as truly democratic no matter how democratic may be their goals and legislative processes; the United Nations (UN) provides a salient example. Yet in a globalized world system, we need to recognize and honor a new pattern of democratic organization that links legislative accountability to individuals with group representation. A good example of this design can be found in the European Union, where a council of ministers (representing states) share power with a parliament (representing all the citizens' member states). This new form of democratic organization, which links individual and group representation, still lacks a distinctive name; we need to accept one before it can be widely established in response to the acute requirements of global governance in our synarchic world.

Bureaucratic Accountability

Can any bureaucracy be truly representative if the legislative assemblies that set its agendas and monitor its performance are not also representative? This is an increasingly urgent question throughout the world: more representative legislative bodies entail more diverse bureaucracies. An unrepresentative legislature may support the tokenistic inclusion of a few minority people in the public service, but public bureaucracies will not, I believe, become truly "representative" unless the organs that control them are also representative.

Although our thinking about public institutions typically focuses on the state level, the same principles apply to interstate organizations like the UN. Here, in its most conspicuous form, the representation of states is reflected in the quota system imposed on the UN Secretariat to assure its fairness in dealing with all member states; the principle of group representation is carried to its ultimate level in this context. A more useful model can be found in the design of the European Union, which links a Council of Ministers representing the member states with a European Parliament representing all citizens. The Secretariat

of the European Union should, in principle at least, be highly representative of all participating European communities.

Fairness versus Representativeness

Although I have not used “fairness” in this chapter, representativeness and fairness are closely linked. Can anyone count on an unrepresentative bureaucracy (police, teachers, welfare workers, tax collectors, etc.) to treat all communities fairly when they are not themselves fairly constituted? This is apparent in the current war against terrorism, which, in the name of homeland security, has targeted certain minority groups for special attention.¹

Unfortunately, our theories of representation are one-sided. They provide for the representation of individual voters, but not for the representation of groups, especially communal groups, nor of diasporan citizens living abroad. By contrast, in societies like Afghanistan, it seems clear that group representation is paramount, as in the Constitution of its new interim regime. In traditional societies we see that representation, if it exists, is of communities, not of individuals. These communities include not only those living inside Afghanistan, but Afghans living elsewhere in the world. We may hope that Afghanistan will add the representation of individuals to its Constitution when it adopts a democratic form, but we cannot expect that established tribal organizations and loyalties will vanish or become irrelevant or that they will make a sharp distinction between Afghans at home or in diaspora.

Globalization and Diversity

Conversely, in modern democracies, as they become more multiethnic due to increased flow of migrants boosted by globalization, we need to supplement the representation of individual citizens (now the dominant and, indeed, only recognized form of representation) with representation for groups. This means that reform efforts need to be contextual: in more traditional societies (like Afghanistan), representation for individual citizens needs to become established, but in more industrialized societies, representation for groups also needs to be institutionalized, especially for “indigenous people” as well as for ethnic minority communities. However, there are other unrepresented (or inadequately represented) groups, especially women and children, the elderly, and, indeed, the unborn and the “environment.”

Women and children have recently received more attention, but discrimination against them is endemic, reaching acute levels in Afghanistan under the Taliban, as we all know today. As a senior, I am also sensitive to ageism. We tend

to equate “people” with the “employed” populations, and retirees are often not seen as real people.

Globalization is not homogenization—far from it! In fact, the spread of global economic, political, informational, cultural, and military forces provokes local glocalizing responses. This is not localization, a purely parochial and natural process as local communities evolve their distinctive practices and ideas. By contrast, in the context of globalization, localities seek to protect their interests and assert their distinctive identities. This glocalizing process generates new phenomena that assert and accentuate local autonomy and leadership. To defend their uniqueness, glocalities evolve products and understandings they view as relevant and important for the rest of the world. Their capacity to influence the world is enhanced by proliferating lines in the global network that enable mobility (the movement of people and information) made possible by new technologies such as the airplane, the Internet, and global English.

The outcome of mobility is diversity and dispersion: every glocality now has increasingly diverse communities, and every locality has become globalized by the dispersion of some of its members. Recognizing this reality, we should not resist globalization; instead, we should encourage constructive glocalization, in Hawai‘i and throughout the Asia-Pacific region. This can include the development of local languages, Web sites, cultural practices and products, and truly representative political institutions. It is only fair that people should have the right and opportunity to develop their individual identity and that they should be secure in the process, which requires some kind of global ordering.

The result of globalization and glocalization can be seen in the prevalence of synarchy, a complex networking system that links synthesis and anarchy. Organizational structures that are effective and representative are evolving rapidly to create a global network of linked states, substates, interstate organizations, and a host of nongovernmental organizations at all levels. Corporations, capital flow, and financial institutions are an important part of this network, but they are increasingly countervailed by nonprofit public institutions. In this context, tensions often erupt in civil wars and revolts, even terrorism, leading to the sense of pervasive anarchy. Yet this very anarchy, despite its inhuman costs, also protects zones of autonomy and helps prevent the emergence of authoritarianism, which, at the global level, might create an oppressive and tyrannical form of world empire that we would all abhor.

Virtual Representation

To make this new form of democracy viable, however, it needs to include the virtual representation of “unrepresentable groups,” a process that will always be contested yet needs desperately to be addressed. The most obvious category

of unrepresentable groups consists of unborn future generations. Who can or should speak for them? All fecund present generations recognize not only the inevitable birth of future generations but acknowledge our obligation to leave or restore a sustainable world for them to live in.

By implication, the earth and all living things are also interested participants; without seeking to reify the environment, it needs to be represented also in global and glocal politics. To do that, we could empower specialized professional and humanitarian groups (associations and institutes) to act on behalf of the unrepresentable. In traditional democracies like the United Kingdom, a House of Peers was established by ascriptive criteria; membership was not representative but rested on status. Today, hereditary peers have been discharged and new forms of representation are being established—they might well include the recognition of unrepresentative categories and the institution of virtual representation to protect these essential interests.

New patterns of democratic governance at all levels (substate, state, and global) are needed if fairness is to be protected with respect to all kinds of minorities (based on age, gender, and ethnicity), if diversity and dispersion are to be safeguarded, and if unrepresentable constituencies are to be given a fair hearing. Unborn generations have no way of securing direct representation, but it is surely possible to give them virtual representation through organized (“futurist”) groups able to take a long-term view. The same is true, of course, for the environment, which needs to be respected and conserved despite its inability to speak for itself; there are “ecosophical” groups prepared to reify environmental entities as deserving of representation. We might then think about “virtual” as well as “concrete” representation.

A truly representative bureaucracy that can be counted on to administer public affairs fairly should include members from diverse perspectives. It also needs to manage public affairs in the interest of unrepresented groups, including women, the very young and very old, the unborn, and the environment, including all living creatures.

Note

1. Imtiaz Hussain, a colleague who lives in Mexico and was scheduled to participate in a panel I had planned for the New Orleans ISA conference in March 2002, decided to withdraw for fear that, as a Muslim, he would be mistreated if he came to the United States. His fears may be quite unjustified, but they illustrate the problem of fairness as impacted by globalization.