

Rethinking Equality of States in Global Politics: Rhetoric or Reality

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Abstract: *Do cooperating states in the international institutions really have equal powers? This analysis examines the idea of equality of states in the United Nations. The objectives of this research are to understand the principles and power of equality of states in the United Nations charter. The equality of states has always been questioned in the international system. However, the work is centered on rethinking the equality of states in global politics: rhetoric or reality. The study also includes understanding the principles that make up for the equality of states in the United Nations charter and to examine how beneficial are institutions like the United Nations are to third-world countries of the world. Globalization is seen as a major factor for the equality of states because the whole world has become a global village which already poses as a threat to the sovereignty of nation-states in international politics. The theories used to back up and explain nation-states interactions include, realism, liberalism, modernization theory and the dependency theory. The research was carried out with the qualitative approach that depends on the review of available literatures and data. A conclusion was reached by the researcher that indeed states are not equal and the major institutions that help in state interactions were created when most countries of the world were either under colonial rule or were not-existing which gave room for series of gaps which the United Nations have been critiqued for. However, the researcher encourages the third-world countries to look inward and develop themselves by investing in the youths and the growth of local industries*

Keywords: power, united nations, equality of states, sovereignty and global politics.

INTRODUCTION

The aphorism “all fingers are not equal” is true at every level and applies to every facet of life internally and externally. Equality has always been a topic that has lingered for ages and with the

rapid modernization of local societies, the need to drive for equality at all levels has increased. Hoffman (2012), states and the people they represent are not always equal in the global decision-making processes that intimately affect them. Influence at global fora can be a product of economic strength, military might and a government's capacity to engage strategically in diplomatic activities. In these highly political environments, science, altruism, and transparency are often displaced by bargaining, trade-offs, and national self-interest. Stuckler (2008) in addition notes that the majority share of votes that developing and emerging countries enjoy in many global governance bodies does not guarantee the adoption of policies that benefit them. Indeed, empirical evidence indicates inequitable prioritization and funding for issues that affect the interests of the most powerful countries to an extent that is disproportionate to what these issues' global burden justifies. All states may legally be equal in many global forums, but some states are clearly more equal than others.

Studies by Bhagwati (1995), Lindert, (2003), Zweifel (2006), explain that there are four bases for equality in the international governing systems: definition of equality, assessment of equality's value, belief as to whom equality is owed, and views on how equality should be operationalized in the international system. With respect to the first consideration, equality in global governance can be defined either with respect to equal voting power in casting ballots, equal procedural fairness in voicing opinions, or equal influence in determining substantive outcomes whereby decisions reflect the interests of everyone participating in the particular community. On the second consideration, Bhagwati (1995), argues that equality in decision making has extrinsic value by evoking a sense of ownership in decisions, enhancing political systems' overall effectiveness, and resulting in better policies. Lindert (2003) opines that the third consideration, global justice may infer that equality should be conceptualized at the individual level, yet traditional Westphalian sovereignty prioritizes equality of states over equality of people and mostly denies individuals legal personality in the international system. With respect to the fourth consideration, equality can be exercised either directly by individuals or through representatives who are either specially elected for this task or are appointed by existing national governments.

From the above, it is crystal clear that there are bases for equality and some states have more points on their side and claim equality above other states. However, regardless of how we should define, value, conceptualize and operationalize equality in global governance, it seems, at the very least, that today's international institutions should be as equal as they claim to be. Indeed, it would be very problematic if the world's leading international institutions claim superordinate normative authority based on having egalitarian one state-one-vote governance models if in reality these institutions' decision-making processes do not reflect the egalitarian ideals they claim to embody. This includes the United Nations General Assembly and the many United Nations specialized agencies, councils, treaty bodies, conferences of parties, affiliated organizations, funds, and other entities with plenary governance structures that have committed themselves to sovereign equality in decision making (United Nations, 1945).

For these international institutions, achieving sovereign equality carries an intrinsic value even if only to the extent that it averts a moral fraud by ensuring that these institutions fulfill their constitutional commitments and deserve the superordinate normative authority they claim. It also carries an extrinsic value in that any obstructions to equality in these institutions' decision-making processes may focus international attention on their limitations and may breed distrust and contempt for them or global governance more broadly.

In line with Falsafi (2011), the international communities in the current era are of organs such as the members of different national communities are unequal. Countries in terms of natural and social elements, extent of territory, population and natural resources and level of development are in unequal state to each other. Most political influence of big powers predicate lack of real political independence of small states and there is no balance in the obligation to respect the rules and the freedom of members of the international community. He states further that Veto "special privileges" which is reserved for the five permanent members of the Security Council, brings a manifestation of inequality and discrimination in the legal system of the United Nations in mind. The entry into force of the Charter of the United Nations is subjected to the approval of two thirds of the members, including five permanent members. As well as the special authority of the Security Council, with the aim of supporting international peace and security is especially important. In short, weak states under the UN Charter Treaty allied with the powerful states of the world that first, brings equality, and these equal rights, from optimistic view, can promote inequality of weak governments.

Conceptual Meaning of Globalization

According to Heywood (2015), "globalization is a complex, elusive and controversial term that has been used to refer to a process, a policy, a marketing strategy, a predicament or even an ideology." Many scholars in line with Saul (2016) have tried to bring greater clarity to the debate about the nature of globalization by distinguishing between globalization as a process or set of processes (highlighting the dynamics of transformation or change, in common with other words that end in the suffix '-ization', such as modernization) and globality as a condition (indicating the set of circumstances that globalization has brought about, just as modernization has created a condition of modernity).

Others have used the term globalism to refer to the ideology of globalization, the theories, values, and assumptions that have guided or driven the process. Heywood adds that the problem with globalization is that it is not so much an 'it' as a 'them': it is not a single process but a complex of processes, sometimes overlapping and interlocking but also, at times, contradictory and oppositional ones. It is therefore difficult to reduce globalization to a single theme. Nevertheless, the various developments and manifestations that are associated with globalization, or indeed globality, can be traced back to the underlying phenomenon of interconnectedness. Globalization, regardless of its forms or impact, forges connections between previously unconnected people,

communities, institutions, and societies. Held and McGrew (2019) thus defined globalization as ‘the widening, intensifying, speeding up, and growing impact of world-wide interconnectedness’. In line with Heywood, “the interconnectedness that globalization has spawned is multidimensional and operates through distinctive economic, cultural and political processes.” In other words, globalization has a number of dimensions or ‘faces. Although globalization theorists have championed particular interpretations of globalization, these are by no means mutually exclusive. Instead, they capture different aspects of a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Globalization has been interpreted in three main ways:

Economic globalization is the process through which national economies have, to a greater or lesser extent, been absorbed into a single global economy.

Cultural globalization is the process whereby information, commodities and images that have been produced in one part of the world enter into a global flow that tends to ‘flatten out’ cultural differences between nations, regions, and individuals.

Political globalization is the process through which policymaking responsibilities have been passed from national governments to international organizations.

Myth and Reality of Globalization

The essence of globalization would not be apt conveyed if the definition of the term is just put forward, hence, the researcher has dug deep into the term to see how it fits in modern term and know if the term is just an academic rhetoric or a reality that is visible to the blind and audible to the deaf.

In line with Heywood (2015), one of the most used terms in global discuss is “Globalization’. He opines that although globalization may be the buzz word of our time, there has been intense debate about its impact and significance especially in modern context. Heywood submits that there are three ways by which this topic can be explained: the hyper-globalists, the skeptics, and the transformation lists.

Heywood says that the hyper-globalizers are “The chief amongst ‘the believers’ in globalization. Hyper globalism portrays globalization as a profound, even revolutionary set of economic, cultural, technological, and political shifts that have intensified since the 1980s. Particular emphasis, in this view, is placed on developments such as the digital revolution in information and communications, the advent of an integrated global financial system and the emergence of global commodities that are available almost anywhere in the world. Indeed, hyper globalism is often based on a form of technological determinism, which suggests that the forces creating a single global economy became irresistible once the technology that facilitates its existence was available.”

He states further that: Nevertheless, hyper globalism offers an unbalanced and exaggerated view of globalization, in at least two senses. First, it overstates the extent to which policymakers have been dominated by ‘irresistible’ economic and technological forces, underestimating the importance of values, perceptions, and ideological orientations. Second, the images of the ‘end of sovereignty’ and the ‘twilight of the nation-state’ can be said to feature amongst the myths of globalization (sometimes called ‘globalony’). In explaining the Skeptics, Heywood (2015), opines that “the Skeptics, by contrast, have portrayed globalization as a fantasy and dismissed the idea of an integrated global economy. They point out that the overwhelming bulk of economic activity still takes place within, not across, national boundaries, and that there is nothing new about high levels of international trade and cross-border capital flows. Skeptics have, further, argued that globalization has been used as an ideological device by politicians and theorists who wish to advance a market-orientated economic agenda. The globalization thesis has two major advantages in this respect. In the first place, it portrays certain tendencies (such as the shift towards greater flexibility and weaker trade unions, controls on public spending and particularly welfare budgets, and the scaling down of business regulation) as inevitable and therefore irresistible. Second, it suggests that such shifts are part of an impersonal process, and not one linked to an agent, such as big business, whose interests might be seen to be served by globalizing tendencies. However, although such skepticism has served to check the over-boiled enthusiasm of earlier globalization theorists, it is difficult to sustain the idea of ‘business as normal’.

Overview of global politics

To understand the concept, “Global politics” it is right that we give meaning to the distinct words that make the compound concepts. The *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought* defines politics as the “process whereby a group of people, whose opinions or interests are initially divergent, reach collective decisions which are generally regarded as binding on the group, and enforced as common policy”. In line with Heywood, the term ‘global’ has two meanings, and these have quite different implications as far as global politics is concerned. In the first, global means worldwide, having planetary (not merely regional or national) significance. The globe is, in effect, the world. Global politics, in this sense, refers to politics that is conducted at a global rather than a national or regional level. There is no doubt that the global or worldwide dimension of politics has, in recent decades, become more significant. There has been a growth of international organizations, some of which, like the United Nations, come close to having a universal membership.

According to Ohmae (2009),

“Growing number of political issues have also acquired a ‘global’ character, in that they affect, actually or potentially, all parts of the world and so all people on the planet. This particularly applies in the case of the environment, often seen as the paradigm example of a ‘global’ issue, because nature operates as an interconnected whole, in which everything

affects everything else. The same, we are often told, applies to the economy, where it is commonplace to refer to the ‘global economy’ or ‘global capitalism’, in that fewer and fewer countries now remain outside the international trading system and are unaffected by external investment and the integration of financial markets. For theorists of globalization, this trend towards global interconnectedness is not only perhaps the defining feature of modern existence, but also requires that traditional approaches to learning need to be rethought, in this case by adopting a ‘borderless’ or ‘trans planetary’ approach to politics.”

Ohmae (2009), submits that the claim that we live in a ‘borderless world’, or the assertion that the state is dead, and sovereignty is irrelevant. He adds that in no meaningful sense has politics at the global level transcended politics at the national, local or, for that matter, any other level. This is why the notion of global politics, draws on the second meaning of ‘global’. In this view, global means comprehensive; it refers to all elements within a system, not just to the system as a whole. Global politics thus takes place not just at a global level, but at and, crucially, across, all levels – worldwide, regional, national, sub-national and so on.

Drawing from the above, it means that, ‘the global’ and ‘the international’ coexist in a politically sane environment that allows for them to complement one another and should not be seen as rival or incompatible modes of understanding.

Key Factors in Global Politics

Power

Baylis and Owen (2009) opine that, all forms of politics are about power. There is no doubting the fact that politics is seen as the study of power, its core theme being: who gets what, when how? Global politics raises two main questions about power. The first is about where power is located: who has it? During the Cold War era, this appeared to be an easy question to answer. Two ‘superpowers’ dominated world politics, dividing the global system into rival ‘spheres of influence’. Baylis and Owen add that the East-West conflict reflected the existence of a bipolar world order, marked by the political, ideological, and economic ascendancy, respectively, of the USA and the Soviet Union. Heywood (2015) add that the end of the Cold War precipitated a major debate about the shifting location of global power. In his opinion, the fall of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union left the USA as the world’s sole superpower, meaning that it had been transformed into a global hegemon. Such a view also took account of the extent to which the USA was the architect, and chief beneficiary, of the process of globalization, as well as the possessor of enormous ‘structural’ power, its pivotal position within institutions such as the UN, the WTO, IMF, and World Bank giving it disproportional influence over the frameworks within which states relate to one another and decide how things shall be done.

Security

Booth and Wheeler (2008), aver that security is the deepest and most important issue in politics. At its heart is the question: how can people live a decent and worthwhile existence, free from threats, intimidation, and violence? Security has usually been thought of as a particularly pressing issue in international politics because, while the domestic realm is ordered and stable, by virtue of the existence of a sovereign state, the international realm is anarchical and therefore threatening and unstable. Both and Wheeler agree that the most important actors in the international system are states, security is primarily understood in terms of 'national' security. As, in a world of self-help, all states are under at least potential threat from all other states, each state must have the capacity for self-defense. National security therefore places a premium on military power, reflecting the assumption that the more militarily powerful a state is, the more secure it is likely to be. This focus on military security nevertheless draws states into dynamic, competitive relationships with one another, based on what is called the security dilemma. This is the problem that a military build-up for defensive purposes by one state is always liable to be interpreted by other states as potentially or actually aggressive, leading to retaliatory military build-ups and so on. The security dilemma gets to the very heart of politics amongst states, making it the quintessential dilemma of international politics (Booth and Wheeler 2008).

Justice

According to Heywood, realist theorists view justice as a largely irrelevant issue in international or global politics. Relations between states should be determined by hard-headed judgments related to the national interest, not by ethical considerations. Liberals, by contrast, insist that international politics and morality should go hand in hand, amoral power politics being a recipe for egoism, conflict, and violence. Traditionally, however, they have defended the idea of 'international' justice based on principles that set out how nation-states should behave towards one another. Respect for state sovereignty and the norm of noninterference in the affairs of other states, seen as guarantees of national independence and therefore political freedom, are clearly an example of this. Such thinking is also reflected in 'just war' theory.

Heywood (2015) states that the idea that the use of violence through war can only be justified if both the reasons for war and the conduct of war conform to principles of justice. However, the growth of interconnectedness and interdependence has extended thinking about morality in world affairs, particularly through an increasing emphasis on the notion of 'global' or 'cosmopolitan' justice. The idea of global justice is rooted in a belief in universal moral values, values that apply to all people in the world regardless of nationality and citizenship. The most influential example of universal values is the doctrine of international human rights. Such cosmopolitanism has shaped thinking on the issue of global distributive justice, suggesting, for instance, that rich countries should give more foreign aid, and that there should be a possibly substantial redistribution of wealth between the world's rich and the world's poor. (Heywood, 2015).

Economy

Economic issues have been said to be the center of ideological concepts and political debates in global politics. Economic factors have to be put into consideration due to the size and strengths of different economies. According to Heywood “For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the core battleground in global politics was the contest between two opposing economic structures, capitalism and socialism. This nevertheless culminated in the victory of capitalism over socialism, registered in particular through the collapse of communism”. After the Second World War a lot of economies collapsed thereby creating a bipolar world which ushered in new global economic order. The US after the Second World War set up a Marshall Plan also known as European Recovery Program in 1948. It was crafted as a four-year plan to rebuild cities, industries, and infrastructure heavily damaged during the war and to remove trade restrictions between European neighbors as well as foster commerce between those countries and the United States. According to the World Bank the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic brought with it a new classification of world economies according to their per capita income. The income level is further sub-divided into four groups, the low income, low-middle income, upper-middle income, and high-income countries. In global politics there are also economic arrangements which the IMF/ World Bank, The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) follow under.

Theories of Global Politics

Realism

According to Donnely (2000), realism (sometimes called ‘political realism’) claims to offer an account of world affairs that is ‘realistic’, in the sense that it is hard-headed and (as realists see it) devoid of wishful thinking and deluded moralizing. For realists, global politics is, first and last, about power and self-interest. This is why it is often portrayed as a ‘power politics’ model of international politics. Donnely further assert that ‘Politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action’.

Heywood, Baylis and Donnely all agree that the key theme of realist theory can be summed up into egoism plus anarchy equals power politics. They suggest that this formulation betrays a basic theoretical fault line within realism, dividing it into two distinct schools of thought. One of these – classical realism – explains power politics in terms of egoism, while the other – neorealism, or structural realism – explains it in terms of anarchy. However, these alternative approaches reflect more a difference of emphasis within realism rather than a division into rival ‘schools’, as the central assumptions of realism are common to most realist theorists, even though they may disagree about which factors are ultimately the most important.

Liberalism

Donnelly says that Liberalism has been the dominant ideological force shaping western political thought. Indeed, some portray liberalism as the ideology of the industrialized West and identify it with western civilization itself. Liberal ideas and theories had a considerable impact on the discipline of international relations as it took shape following the first World War, although they drew on a much older tradition of so-called 'idealist' theorizing which dates back, via Kant's belief in the possibility of 'universal and perpetual peace', to the Middle Ages and the ideas of early 'just war' thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas. Marginalized during the early post-1945 period due to the failure of the liberal inspired Versailles Settlement and the ascendancy of realist thought, liberal ideas nevertheless attracted growing attention from the 1970s onwards, often in the form of so-called neoliberalism. This largely stripped liberalism of its idealist trappings. The end of the Cold War (sometimes seen as the 'liberal moment' in world affairs), the growing impact of globalization and a new wave of democratization in the 1990s each gave liberal theory additional impetus

Modernization theory

Modernization theory is a global economic theory that talks about the process of restructuring societies. It is a progressive transition from a traditional to a modern society. The theory originated from a German sociologist called Max Weber, the theory examines the internal factor of a society and assumes that with aid it can move from traditional through the process of development the developed states went through to a modernized society. During the colonial era Britain was profit focused and so it focused on administrative styles (the indirect rule) that helped in the expansion of the British economy. France on the other hand was focused on demolishing the culture of its colonies and contracted on making them Frenchmen, it was focused on spreading French civilization by implementing an administrative style (policy of assimilation) that aided this goal.

Dependency theory

This is a theory that states, resources flow from the "periphery" also known as poor and underdeveloped countries to the "core" who are regarded as the rich and industrialized countries, thereby, enriching the core at the expense of the periphery. This simply means that wealth is being transferred from the economy of these poor countries to the economies of the core by means of trading. The periphery provides raw materials to the core, and it is refined and processed into finished products and are shipped back to the periphery to buy at a high price. For instance, Nigeria has an economy dependent on crude oil, however, Nigeria does not have a refinery, which means she sells her crude oil to countries that have refineries, and they sell the refined oil back to her at a high cost. A common feature of the periphery is low level of industrialization and high level of importation which kills the economy of the poor and make the dependent on the core for things as little as toothpicks

CONCLUSION

The underdeveloped and developing nations have always been at a disadvantage being that during the inception of majority of these international organizations they were either non-existent or where under colonial rule and they did not have a say in the process of establishment. However, the nations that created these organizations created them in such a way that it would favour and benefit the core. Therefore, the researcher has drawn to the conclusion that state equality is non-existent and they should develop or innovate new ways of pushing for development.

Recommendation

From the research work above the following are the researchers' recommendations:

1. Underdeveloped and developing states should focus on the growth and development of their respective nations by developing their local industries.
2. Third world countries should invest in their youths since the youths are a majority of their population.
3. The periphery and the semi-periphery should create functioning systems that would aid the growth of countries in their different regions.
4. Effective leaders should be put at the helm of affairs in the low and middle-income countries.

Suggestions for Further Findings

This research work has looked into rethinking the equality of states in global politics in the United Nations: rhetoric or reality, a number of studies were made on which a conclusion was drawn. However, the study is not exhaustive, as there could still be many developments unknown to the author at the time the research was carried out. The researcher, therefore, recommends an in-depth study into the equality of states in regional and sub-regional institutions in global politics.

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