Democratisation of the world: Do we need a global parliament?*

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Abstract

Already in the 1920s the introduction of a world parliament had been suggested. Since the creation of the United Nations (UN) this idea has lived on under the name of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA). During the past several years, support for a UNPA appears to have grown notably, probably due to an increased awareness of the undemocratic nature of the UN and world governance in general. Furthermore, global problems cannot be solved by local governments. To solve those legitimately, democratisation is needed on a global scale, now more than ever. We must make sure that any supranational body deciding on global issues is democratic. One approach to democratise globalisation is through a world parliament. Ideally in such a system the parliament would represent the citizens and the representatives can be held accountable for their actions. However, a general critique to this theory is that no parliamentary democracy is truly democratic. In a parliamentary democracy people must generally turn over their vote to a party, losing their control over what happens in politics and hence society. Whether the solution to the problem of an undemocratic world should be mediated by a world parliament, e.g. under the umbrella of the UN, is the discussion at hand. I will argue that we do need something like a UNPA, though it needs to be set up differently than our average parliament. At any time we, the citizens of the world, must be able to withdraw our mandate and give it to someone else, or decide ourselves on the matter at hand. Here liquid democracy, where the voting power is invested in delegates rather than representatives, may be part of the solution. Whatever method we decide to use, we must make the people govern the world.

1   Introduction

The idea of a world parliament has already been suggested in the 1920s by the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations (UN). Since the creation of the UN this idea has lived on under the name of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA). During the past several years, support for a UNPA appears to have grown notably due to a strong campaign and possibly the increased awareness of the undemocratic nature of the UN and, probably even more, world governance in general.

The democratic deficit in world governance needs to be reduced. Policies important for the world citizens concern, for instance, human rights and climate change. These policies are now decided by multinational corporations (both through lobbying and more directly) and undemocratic governments that influence world politics unproportionally. Getting rid of all world governance is no option, since global problems cannot be solved by local governments. The only problem is that the bodies in place and treaties created are inefficient and undemocratic. To solve this, democratisation is needed on a global scale, now more than ever. This is not a plea against global governance bodies, but we must make certain that any supranational body deciding on global issues is democratic.

One approach to democratise globalisation is through a world parliament. Ideally, in such a system the parliament would represent the citizens, and the representatives can be held accountable for their actions.

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However, a general critique to this theory is that no parliamentary democracy is truly democratic. In a parliamentary democracy people must generally turn over their vote to a party, losing their control over what happens in politics and hence society. Another criticism includes that we want every world citizen to participate, but that would be difficult with undemocratic countries.

Whether the solution to the problem of an undemocratic world should be mediated by a world parliament, e.g. under the umbrella of the UN, is the discussion at hand. I will argue that we do need something like a UNPA, though it needs to be set up differently than our average parliament. By voting once every four years we effectively lose our vote. A politician may have promised to do one thing but does another thing, and there is not much we can do about that in an electoral-representative democracy. At any time we, the citizens of the world, must be able to withdraw our mandate and give it to someone else, or decide ourselves on the matter at hand. Here direct and liquid democracy, where the voting power is invested in delegates rather than representatives [16, 18], may be part of the solution. More direct forms of democracy have been used at many locations and times. The ancient Athens democracy is an early well-known example of direct democracy. Even though it is hard to imagine that this would work for large groups of people, e.g. nations or the world, some call this a sham difference [11]. Liquid democracy is an example of (at least partly) direct democracy, and is proving itself to be functioning. It is succesfully used in e.g. Landkreis Friesland and Iceland. As an 'alternative' to democracy, *sociocracy* does not use the principle *one person, one vote* but rather *consent* is reached through means of deliberation. Whatever method we decide to use, we must make the people govern the world.

2 Globalisation

Globalisation has been happening for the last few centuries, or even longer, depending on your definition of globalisation. The use of technology (aeroplanes, internet) accelerated this process notably. Together with the lowering of nation barriers by means of trade agreements, globalisation tends towards a situation where nation borders have less and less meaning. Globalisation has brought us (especially Western countries) many advantages. Free trade, for instance, generally has the consequence of more competitive prices, consumers have wider variety of products to choose from, and there is free movement of labour, though the last issue is a bit controversial.

2.1 Problems

Recent trade agreements comprise the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). These two treaties together cover more than 60% of global Gross Domestic Product [15], which emphasises the impact of these agreements. In principle these agreements are consistent with the increase of globalisation, but the disadvantages range from restricting cultural works (books, music, ...) to unaffordable medicine in the Third World.

Many have pointed to large problems with globalisation as it is happening right now. The impact of globalisation on the environment, on human rights, social injustice, and on the world economy, are closely related. Underlying problems have to do with the influence of multinational corporation on legislation, or the non-existence of legislation (or enforcement) such that multinationals can do whatever they wish. This issue is intertwined with underlying problems, among which "imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics" [4]. Clearly, I am slightly stretching the interpretation of Castro's words during the Havana Declaration of 1979 of the Non-Aligned Movement, a group of states which are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc [20]. However, this does sketch the relevant context in which globalisation is occurring, with all its negative consequences.

2.2 Potential solutions

Solutions may be found in introducing and enforcing global legislation. As an example, in *Plan B*, Brown [1] suggests that we must "[cut] net carbon dioxide emissions 80 percent by 2020, [stabilise] population at 8 billion or lower, [eradicate] poverty, and [restore] the earth's natural systems, including its soils, aquifers, forests, grasslands, and fisheries." Clearly, if we want to implement such an ambitious plan,

changing laws would be a necessary condition. In the case of reducing CO_2 emissions, less ambitious plans [10] would still need new legislation.[1]

However, if even our national constitutions (which are supposed to be fundamental to our *rechtsstaat*) often appear to have little effect on legislation [e.g. 9], and legislation is often not enforced the way it should be, we want to explore other options. Of course one alternative is a bottom-up approach, e.g. by using technology [e.g. 5]. *Bitcoin* would be an example of such a technology. But that can only get us that far. If we want to implement *Plan B* for instance we need to change laws. Of course, in the example of Bitcoin, laws may even get in the way [8]. Since both the technical/grassroots and the legislative approaches appear to be incomplete, it would be best to combine the two approaches, as for instance done by the Pirate Party movement [e.g. 5].

2.2.1 World Federalist Movement

If there were a world government in place, it would be possible to create world legislation and enforce this. This may be a solution to many of the world's problems, though there are questions concerning its feasibility, desirability and necessity of establishing a common global political authority [7]. In case of a world *federation* where nation-states still keep a large amount of sovereignty, the question about feasibility and that of desirability (the *tyranny* argument) would be less important issues. Concerning its necessity, the argumentation of Section 2.1 suggests that a world government is necessary. It does not prove that it is necessary (or sufficient): that is outside the scope of this paper.

The World Federalist Movement (WFM) was created in 1947 by those concerned that the structure of the new United Nations was too similar to the League of Nations which had failed to prevent World War II, both being loosely structured associations of sovereign nation-states, with few autonomous powers [17]. Applying the principle of subsidiarity, a world federation would be able to address only global issues (like the negative effect from free trade agreements or climate change) in a much more direct way than currently international anarchy does, assuming it addresses these problems at all.

The role of the WFM is much smaller than envisioned, but it is an important part of civil society and, subsequently, influences world governance. Recent projects of the WFM include:

- International Criminal Court (ICC);

- Responsibility to Protect (R2P);

- United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA).

The first has been established, and the second and third projects are work in progress. Section 4 will discuss the background and importance of a UNPA for the problem at hand.

2.2.2 Non-Aligned Movement

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is a group of states that agree to not align them with or against any major power bloc [20]. Even though this is an immediate solution to the problems with globalisation, it does remedy imperialism, neo-colonialism and the like, as Fidel Castro straightforwardly put. In forming any solution (e.g. a world federation) the ideas from the NAM must be taken into account to achieve greater legitimacy. At least with a world federation, there would be no need for the NAM: all states would be represented without the need for power blocs. Of course, this should also have been the case for the UN, meaning that we must realise that theoretical considerations are not always enough to ensure a certain outcome (as one can do in science).

3 Democracy

3.1 Problems

Globalisation is a reality. Because of this we get more global governance, whether we want it or not. As it is now, there is a large democratic deficit. At the same time the world does not appear to be able to solve the big problems like human-induced climate change and the economic crisis (which are really

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[1] Emission trading does not work for several reasons [6].

part of the same problem). For this a world government would be useful, as is very often suggested and intensely debated. The reality is that we do not have a world government, which makes this problem difficult.

3.2   Potential solutions

As with the problems with globalisation, the solution of legitimacy of power, here associated with democracy[2] is probably most efficiently reached by a combination of technology and legislative influence. The option of liquid democracy is an approach where these two ingredients are even inherently intertwined.

Liquid democracy [16], or delegative democracy [18], is different from representative democracy in that no representatives are elected for a fixed period (typically four years). At any time a person may chose a different delegate. Since there are still delegates, it is also not the same as direct democracy. However, there is the option of direct participation. If people have expertise on a specific subject, they may directly decide on specific issues, and they can be delegates for other people. Liquid democracy may very well be essential in reaching truly democratic deliberation and decision-making in society.

4   Global democracy

4.1   United Nations Parliamentary Assembly

A UNPA, or United Nations *Peoples* Assembly, is an assembly of directly elected representatives (or delegates) over the world. The reason for the introduction of such an assembly is simple: to remedy the democratic deficit in world governance, in particular the United Nations.

Some may argue that there already is such a parliament, namely the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The IPU is an international organisation of the parliaments of sovereign states [19]. Even though there are hopes of transforming this organisation to a UNPA, it appears that the goals of the IPU (a forum between parliaments) and those of the UNPA (a parliament of all the world citizens) are not compatible within a single organisation [3].

4.2   Implementation

In principle it would be easy to introduce a UNPA, since there are provisions for it in the UN Charter, namely article 22 allows the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to establish subsidiary bodies that it may deem necessary for the performance of its functions. Initially the UNPA would be a purely consultative body, so that its creation is not subject to the veto of the five permanent members of the Security Council. If the body would be transformed to a world parliament that can make binding legislation, the Security Council must agree. This probably means that other reforms within the UN are necessary, but that discussion is outside the scope of this paper.

4.2.1   Voting weights

An evolutionary approach to the introduction of a UNPA has been discussed by Schwartzberg [13], who especially focused on the perceived problem of a too strong relative influence of the peoples of China and India. This would be remedied by introducing a weight factor W for each nation:

$$W = \frac{P + C + 1/N}{3} \, , \tag{1}$$

where P is the population as a percentage of the total for all member nations, C is the paid contribution to the regular UN budget in proportion to the Gross National Income (GNI), and N is the number of nation-states (193 as of 2013). This equation feeds into the equation for the number of seats assigned to each country, where the smallest country would have exactly one seat.[3] This initial-stage model of

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[2]'Benevolent dictators' like Tito and Atatürk may be considered legitimate as well by some people. However, besides some less benevolent actions of these leaders, most people do not consider dictators as legitimate anyway, regardless of their potential benevolence.

[3]Following the reasoning of Schwartzberg [13, p. 42] closely, this would mean that when there ever would be a country with one citizen, the number of seats in the parliament would be equal to the number of world citizens: a highly impractical situation. This issue will be discussed in an upcoming paper and is outside the scope of this paper.

Schwartzberg [13] can be cast into a single equation. For every nation $i \in \{1, 2, ..., N\}$ the number of seats is

$$S_i = \frac{P_i + C_i + 1/N}{3 \cdot \min(P_1, P_2, ..., P_N)} \; . \tag{2}$$

After the initial model, he goes on with introducing a path toward, in the end, a world parliament that can enforce laws, and the implementation of *one person, one vote*. But that is only the very last step of the *Evolutionary Journey*.

For several reasons weighing votes is undesirable and unnecessary. Firstly, nation states already have a lot of power. In the UNGA all member nations have equal representation. Hence the weight of each country, if that would be something desirable anyway, would remain important in world governance. A second UNGA is not needed, rather we need the establishment of a body that represents all world citizens equally (one person, one vote). Secondly, there are moral problems with the proposition, not unlike times when women, or people of a different race, were not allowed to vote. However, the relative monetary contribution $C = $ UN contribution/GNI would result in poor countries having a large say [13, pp. 41–42]. Either positive or negative discrimination, both visible in Eqn 1, may be difficult to sell. Thirdly, introducing weighed voting may keep us from reaching an actual, fair world parliament. I.e., the initial set-up may be difficult to change, or even irreversible. This is not unlike the *Catch 22* of the UN Security Council. Fourthly, weighed voting is unnecessary. Nation borders should not be important and will be less important in the future.

My suggestion would be to weigh the appropriation of seats of each country i with its population:

$$W_i = P_i \; . \tag{3}$$

This is equivalent to *one person, one vote*, except that here the nation state is included as an element of the model. That may be an unnecessary or even undesirable constraint, because many world citizens may want to vote for a representative, or delegate, in a different country than their own.

4.2.2 Other issues

Many would argue that first the nations of the world must have stable democracies with a rule of law (or the related *rechtsstaat*), but this does not need to be a necessary (or sufficient) condition for the introduction of a world parliament. There are several issues that are of similar importance for a world parliament to work and be efficient. I will speak of only one, whose nature is technical and this is how people actually cast votes on any world citizen who is willing to be a delegate or representative.

For fair voting (and deliberation between world citizens) a decentralised free software system must be in place through which anyone can vote and (possibly in a later stage) deliberate on global issues. It must be decentralised, akin to Bittorrent and Bitcoin, because this make sabotage of the system more difficult. It must be free, meaning that anyone is allowed to study, modify and redistribute the code [14]. Of course there are numerous technical issues to think about, but those can be worked out along the way.

A preferable condition would be that all seven billion world citizens have access to the internet. As long as any national government cannot guarantee this, it cannot participate in the elections for a world parliament. Obviously, the legitimacy of a world parliament is increased when more countries, or rather world citizens, participate. Hence, it is in the advantage of the world to develop the tools for internet to the Third World. This is already happening through development aid from both the public and private sectors. An example is the *One Laptop per Child* (OLPC) project. The necessity of an internet connection and the ability to make use of it would push this more, which is a good thing anyway. It would be acceptable for less wealthy citizens to make the vote at a ballot office. In that case there must be an organisation that checks whether voting is done fairly. Furthermore, governments will at some point want to cooperate, since it is a way to have influence, even if that means that this influence is mediated through their citizens. Hence, the condition of an internet connection may not be a big obstacle.

5 Conclusion

In a globalising world, aspects of politics are expanding to many countries, among which *democracy* as is familiar to the Western world. The apparent failure of many of these democratisations over the world

(especially the Middle East and North Africa) has not been the concern of this paper, not lastly because this has not been about the *globalisation of democracies*, but this has been about a *global democracy* (where the unit of concern is the world citizen) [2]. This is a special case of democratisation indeed. Many would argue that first the nations of the world must have stable democracies with a rule of law (or the related *rechtsstaat*), but this does not need to be a necessary condition, as argued above. If a decentralised free software system is in place through which anyone can vote and deliberate on global issues, there is not a significant role left for the national or regional governments. Of course this means that an internet connection is needed for all world citizens. As argued in this paper, governments would be wanting to provide this for their citizens such that their country can have more influence on world politics.

If there must be a UNPA (and I believe there should be), it must have the following requirements:

One person, one vote. It cannot be the case that just because China and India happen to be big countries, their citizens get a lesser weight than those of other countries. There seem to be good arguments for weighed voting [e.g. 13], but that is what we once also thought about women and people of a race or religion different from what was considered superior.

Near certainty of fair, anonymous elections in all participating countries. This must come primarily by means of technology, specifically a decentralised free software authentication system. Only the nation state of each citizen needs to know who he or she is. Secondly, there must be an independent (UN) oversight organisation in place that inspects the fairness of the system, with a focus on possible loopholes in the system that cannot be overcome easily by means of technical adjustments. Technical problems can be solved by the free software community.

Extendibility to delegated voting. As clearly electoral-representative democracies have its problems [e.g. 12], this needs to be amended with other types of democracy, including elements of liquid democracy, sociocracy, sortition and so on. Hence the decentralised voting system in place should be extendable with such abilities, in the first place with layered delegated voting.

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