

**POLITICAL PARTIES AND GLOBAL  
DEMOCRACY**

Jan Aart Scholte

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## Abstract:

This paper examines the place of political parties and party systems in providing democracy for the more global world of the twenty-first century. It argues that recent intense globalisation has by no means rendered political parties and party systems irrelevant. However, political parties have lost substantial democratic impact by failing to move on with today's more global times. Parties could regain considerable stature as democratic forces if they altered a number of practices in line with emergent polycentric governance of a more global world. The paper advances a number of suggestions that could concurrently address the general stagnancy of political parties and the overall underdevelopment of global democracy.

**Keywords:** democracy, globalisation, political parties

## Address for Correspondence:

Professor Jan Aart Scholte

Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation

University of Warwick

Coventry

CV4 7AL

United Kingdom

[Scholte@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:Scholte@warwick.ac.uk)

Tel: 02476572533

Fax: 2476527548

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## **Introduction**

What is the place of political parties and party systems in providing democracy for the more global world of the twenty-first century? If contemporary globalisation has shifted the contours of governance – that is, the ways that societal rules are formulated, applied and reviewed – do political parties need to reinvent their organisation and practices to fulfil their democratic role? If so, what kinds of adjustments are required? Or has globalisation so transformed politics that party formations have become obsolete in the democratic process, no longer being able to deliver adequate public participation in, and public control over, the decisions that shape collective destinies?

This paper argues that the past half-century of intense globalisation has by no means rendered political parties and party systems irrelevant. However, political parties – that is, formal organisations that support candidates for elected public office – have lost substantial democratic impact by failing to move on with today's more global times. Official circles and civil society quarters have generally made considerably more progress to recognise, and adjust their activities to, the shift from a statist towards a polycentric mode of governance that has accompanied contemporary globalisation. In contrast, political parties have for the most part retained a now obsolete statist-territorialist-nationalist *modus operandi*. To the extent that political parties currently have only limited significance for democracy in global affairs, this situation has mainly been of their own making. Parties could regain considerable stature as democratic forces if they (belatedly) altered a number of practices in line with emergent polycentric governance of a more global world.

Along with this heavy critique of failings by political parties to date, the paper also advances a number of suggestions to turn the tide in more positive directions. Such measures could benefit party organisations and wider democracy alike. Greater attention to global affairs, global rules and global institutions by parties could contribute significantly to their revival as democratic players. In turn, more globally oriented political parties could provide a much-needed boost to the broader democratisation of globalisation. The current general stagnancy of political parties and the overall underdevelopment of global democracy would thereby be addressed at

the same time. Reinvigorated party systems are not a panacea for public participation and public accountability in global politics, but they could bring major advances.

The paper elaborates this argument in three broad steps. The first main section defines key concepts ('globalisation', 'governance', 'democracy', and 'political parties') and summarises the consequences of globalisation for governance and democracy in contemporary history. The second section analyses the role in this altered situation of traditional political parties: 'traditional' here meaning territorially based organisations that work at the country level. Country-based political parties have generally failed to reorient themselves to polycentric governance, although a number of changes in their practices could enhance democracy in global politics. The third section of the paper assesses several ways that political parties can be reorganised beyond the state: namely, through international networks of country-based political parties; through regional party formations; and through distinctly global political parties. None of these three strategies seems likely to generate major democratising impacts on globalisation in the short or medium term.

Before proceeding to detail these points it should be stressed that this discussion is more a conceptual reflection than the result of systematic empirical research. The writer's two decades of explorations of globalisation in a host of contexts across the planet may provide some grounds for informed speculations on the problems and prospects of political parties in a more global world. However, the questions and arguments set out here suggest an agenda for future research more than confirmed theses. As the limited bibliographical references in this paper indicate, the question of political parties and the democratisation of globalisation has so far received strikingly – indeed, deplorably – little academic attention.

### **Concepts and context**

To assess the actual and potential roles of political parties in the democratisation of globalisation, it is of course helpful to define terms for the purpose of the analysis at hand, as well as to describe the general context that has prompted the research question. The treatment of these complex and deeply contested conceptual and historical issues must per force be truncated here. Readers who wish may refer

elsewhere to find further elaboration and substantiation of the arguments set out in this section (Scholte, 2005: esp. chs 2, 3, 6, 11).

### *Globalisation and the shift to polycentric governance*

As the word is understood here, globalisation denotes a trend of becoming more global: the expansion of a planetary scale of social life. With globalisation people become more able – technologically, legally, linguistically, culturally, psychologically – to have direct connections with one another wherever on the earth they may be located.

Although globality in this sense of transplanetary social connectivity has sometimes figured importantly in earlier history, global relations have undergone unprecedented growth since the middle of the twentieth century. Global links between persons now arise more frequently, take more forms, transpire faster, and impact more deeply than in any previous era. Indeed, contemporary history has, as never before, seen the emergence of transplanetary instantaneity (whereby certain global transmissions like intercontinental telephone calls occur in effectively no time) and transplanetary simultaneity (whereby certain global phenomena like satellite television broadcasts can involve people spread all over the world at the same time).

In this way globalisation entails a significant *respatialisation* of social relations. The global, planetary sphere becomes, in its own right, an important site of culture, ecology, economics, law, health, history and politics. Countless phenomena like the Internet, air travel, intercontinental production chains, electronic finance, climate change, criminal networks, the United Nations system, ‘world music’, the AIDS pandemic, and women’s movements cannot be geographically reduced to territorial logics. They also have a notable ‘supraterritorial’ quality. This is by no means to say that other (territorial) social spaces such as households, workplaces, districts, countries and regions have become any less important in contemporary society. However, these other scales of social relations are now also supplemented by, and intertwined with, major global domains. It is not possible to understand the human condition in the twenty-first century without significant attention to global dimensions.

While altering the geography of social life, globalisation also has major consequences for the mode of governance. The term ‘governance’ is taken here to refer to the rules and regulatory institutions under which people pursue their societal interactions with each other. The vocabulary of ‘governance’ is here deliberately preferred to that of ‘government’, inasmuch as the latter word is often assumed to designate the formal, centralised, public, national, territorial apparatus of the modern state. In contrast, ‘governance’ encompasses the larger operations of regulation in society: nonstate as well as state; private as well as public; informal as well as formal; supraterritorial as well as territorial. Thus ‘governance’ is understood here in the more encompassing sense that others have suggested when invoking the term ‘governmentality’, although the present analysis does not adopt a Foucauldian approach.

Talk of ‘governance’ rather than ‘government’ is certainly appropriate with respect to contemporary global affairs. The regulation of transplanetary and supraterritorial matters generally involves multiple and diffuse sites. States retain a key role in the construction, implementation and evaluation of the rules that apply to global social relations, but the *statist* apparatus of societal regulation that prevailed in the middle of the twentieth century has given way to a more *polycentric* order.

For one thing, substantial elements of governance have over recent decades become global in scale. As logic might suggest, burgeoning global activities and issues have prompted a notable increase of rules and regulatory institutions with a global span. Some of this transplanetary governance has grown through a proliferation and expansion of suprastate agencies with multicontinental memberships and remits. Well-known examples include the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Yet global governance also entails more than what have traditionally been called ‘international organisations’. Other global-scale regulation has taken a transgovernmental shape, with the development of largely informal transplanetary networks of state officials. Transgovernmental relations have addressed matters as

disparate as crime, human rights, environmental regulation, and various areas of trade (Slaughter, 2004). Perhaps the most visible transgovernmental apparatus is the Group of Eight (G8) process developed since the mid-1970s. Other examples include the Competition Policy Network and the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Still further global governance has expanded in recent times through nonofficial channels. This privatisation of regulation has been manifested in regimes such as the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB, a market-based organisation created in 1973), the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC, a civil society body formed in 1993), and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN, a public-private hybrid established in 1998). Such developments demonstrate that governance of global (and for that matter any other) affairs need not by definition occur through the public sector (Cutler *et al.*, 1999; Hall and Biersteker, 2003).

Concurrently with this substantial growth of global regulation, governance has also taken more regional form during the past half-century of intense globalisation, with an unprecedented expansion of rules and regulatory institutions that apply to a group of contiguous countries. For example, 273 regional trade arrangements had been registered with the WTO as of 2003 (Cosbey, 2004: 2). In certain cases inter-regional governance relationships have emerged, as in the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM) between the European Union (EU) and the so-called 'ASEAN+3' (Association of South East Asian Nations plus China, Japan and South Korea). Many analysts have explained this expansion of regional regulation as both a facilitator of and a policy response to globalisation (Hettne *et al.*, 1999; Hughes *et al.*, forthcoming). As elaborated later in this paper, this trend in contemporary governance opens important possibilities for political parties to achieve democratisation of globalisation through regionalisation.

The growth of suprastate (global and regional) governance has by no means rendered country-based regulation through states irrelevant in a more global world. Arguments widely heard in the early 1990s that ongoing globalisation would provoke a decline, retreat or even demise of the state have been comprehensively refuted. On the contrary, states – especially the more powerful states – remain central actors in

contemporary governance and indeed have ranked among the principal architects of globalisation (Weiss, 1998). In this light the second section of this paper affirms that political parties and party systems focused on the state retain considerable historical mileage in the early twenty-first century.

That said, states behave differently in today's more global world than they did in what could be termed the 'territorialist' politics of an earlier time. One major reorientation of state action has already been mentioned with regard to the growth and importance of transgovernmental networks. Another change has arisen with increased attention by states to global constituencies alongside domestic groups, thereby diluting the previous concentration of government on so-called 'national interests'. For example, a state today may heed pressures from the World Bank, transnational companies and/or global social movements as well as – and sometimes even more than – demands from constituents based in its formal territorial jurisdiction. Moreover, under conditions of greater globality states have acquired a number of different policy instruments, such as computer networks and (in a few cases) intercontinental missiles. In addition, although earlier theses that globalisation necessitates a contraction of the welfare state have been largely refuted, it is clear that states have significantly adjusted social policies in response to the growing global economy. And country-level governance has paralleled global governance with widespread privatisation of various regulatory tasks, as manifested *inter alia* in the creation of independent central banks and the spread of nonofficial financial services authorities.

Finally, intense globalisation of the past half-century has transpired concurrently with – and in various ways contributed to – significant localisation of governance. Across the continents states have undertaken substantial devolution to substate regions and districts. Several states including Brazil and Canada have also revised their constitutions to accord greater autonomy to indigenous peoples residing in the country. Concurrently, many substate governments have 'gone global' by forging direct links with global capital and global governance agencies, as well as by forming their own global networks like United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), an association with several thousand members in over 100 countries. Hence



political parties can also have democratic purpose in a more global world when working in substate government.

In sum, then, unprecedented globalisation of social life in recent history has been accompanied by substantial globalisation, regionalisation, reconfigured nationalisation, and resurgent localisation of governance. To dissect the regulation of a given global issue (whether it be biodiversity loss, tourism, or whatever), analysts must consider public, private and public-private mechanisms across global, macro-regional, country, micro-regional and local scales. Societal regulation has lost the statist character that prevailed in what has frequently been described as the modern Westphalian system. Governance is now much more than government.

The term ‘polycentrism’ well designates this situation of multiple interlocking nodes of regulation that are diffused across multiple scales and across public and private sectors. Others have described this situation with alternative terms including ‘cosmocracy’, ‘mobius-web governance’, ‘netocracy’, ‘new medievalism’, ‘new multilateralism’, and ‘plurilateralism’. Whatever label is used, however, the post-statist mode of governance requires that political parties shift their practices if they are to remain relevant and fulfil their democratising potentials in the twenty-first century.

#### *Democratic deficits in contemporary globalisation*

These democratic inputs from political parties are sorely needed in contemporary governance of global affairs. The shift from statism to polycentrism has generated enormous deficits of public participation in and public control of regulatory processes in society, particularly as they concern global issues. Shortfalls in democracy have produced some of the greatest public unease with contemporary globalisation, as witnessed most dramatically in large street protests as well as more pervasively in the casual conversations of everyday life.

As with definitions of globalisation, this paper is not the place to undertake a lengthy excursion through the meanings of democracy. For present purposes governance is regarded as democratic when decision-taking power lies with the

people – a demos, a public, a ‘community of fate’ – whom the regulations in question affect. Of course political theorists have suggested highly diverse ways to achieve democracy (deliberative, participatory, representative models and more). However, there is general agreement that, whatever its precise form, democracy prevails when the members of a public determine policies: (a) collectively, together, as a group; (b) with equivalent opportunities of involvement for all; (c) voluntarily, without coercion; (d) transparently, for all to see; and (e) responsibly, including suitable accountability mechanisms to obtain redress for errors and omissions.

The many democratic deficits in the governance of contemporary global affairs can be conveniently summarised under four headings. The first major problem is public ignorance. Effective democracy presumes competent agents. However, most people today have far from sufficient information and analytical tools to make sense of globalisation, let alone to take well-founded decisions about its governance. This ignorance is hardly surprising, given how poorly the various sources of public education have fulfilled their task in respect of global affairs. Schools, universities, mass media, civil society associations, governance agencies *and political parties* have all failed to give globalisation the quantity and quality of attention required to have an adequately informed public. With poor education, public mobilisations on globalisation – if they occur at all – easily have little and/or unconstructive impact.

A second leading source of democratic deficits in current governance of globalisation lies in institutional shortcomings. That is, the processes of formulating, implementing, enforcing and evaluating policies that govern global matters have failed to incorporate adequate mechanisms of public participation and public control. For example, public referenda on global policy questions have rarely occurred. Elections to representative offices have normally left global issues on the sidelines. Most public supranational governance agencies and all private regulatory bodies concerned with global affairs have lacked a directly elected legislature. Meanwhile national parliaments and local councils – as well as the political parties who field candidates for these offices – have rarely exercised sufficient scrutiny of government actions in global realms. Courts (on whatever scale, local to global) have systematically failed to give people adequate means of obtaining redress when policies concerning global relations cause harm. Likewise, governance agencies of all

kinds have generally provided insufficient mechanisms for civil society participation in and scrutiny over their activities. Moreover, civil society associations involved in global policy processes have themselves often failed to meet adequate democratic standards in their own behaviour.

Alongside public ignorance and institutional failings, a third key type of democratic deficit in current governance of global matters relates to structural inequalities. It was earlier stressed that democracy requires equivalent opportunities for all to become involved in the policy decisions of a given polity. Yet contemporary global politics is everywhere steeped in social hierarchies. These deeply entrenched relations of dominance and subordination are manifold: by countries of the North over those of the South; by wealthy and professional classes over less skilled and unemployed workers; by modern cultures over non-rationalist life-worlds; by men over women; by whites over people of colour; by urban residents over rural inhabitants; by heterosexuals over lgbt (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) orientations; by middle-aged over younger and older generations; and by able-bodied over disabled persons.

All of these structural inequalities of opportunity have had the effect of arbitrarily skewing participation in global politics. Thus, undemocratically, certain major states have had greater weight in many global governance institutions. Indigenous peoples, women, subordinated races, sexual minorities and youth have generally found it difficult to exercise voice in the governance of global relations. Indeed, the policy directions that have prevailed in the (weakly democratic) regulation of contemporary globalisation have often sustained and sometimes even exacerbated arbitrary social hierarchies (Scholte, 2005: ch 10).

The marginalisation of subordinated social groups often overlaps with a fourth major source of democratic deficits in contemporary global politics, namely, an insufficient recognition of supraterritorial publics. Globalisation and the broader respatialisation of social life of which it is a part have over the past half-century significantly reconfigured patterns of collective identity (Scholte, 2005: ch 7). As a result, the nature of the demos – that is, ‘the people’ whose participation in and control over governance needs to be assured – has become far more complex. In

territorialist times of old, 'rule by the people' simply meant rule by the national community that inhabited a given country. However, democracy in a more global world must address a plurality of publics, including many whose geography does not coincide with traditional territorial spaces.

For one thing, the proliferation and growth of transplanetary diasporas in contemporary globalisation has brought a significant supraterritorial element to many national solidarities. Prominent examples of 'global nations' include Armenians, Chilean exiles, Indians, domestic servants from the Philippines, Palestinians and Sikhs. In addition, increased globality has involved an expansion of nonterritorial communities, that is, publics that have no inherent link to a particular homeland. Examples include global bonds among co-religionists, among people of the same gender or race, among those of a common class or profession, and among those of a similar sexual orientation. Furthermore, recent history has seen many persons increasingly identify themselves, at least partly, with a global humanity. This growing cosmopolitanism has been reflected *inter alia* in greater talk of a 'world community', 'human rights', 'global public goods', and even 'global citizenship'.

Yet the governance of global affairs has so far generally failed to accommodate this growth of supraterritorial publics. Mainstream political theory and practice still assume that the demos takes the form of a territorial-national community. An incipient global civil society has given some political space to plural and hybrid identities, but official policy processes *and political party activities* on global issues have tended to marginalise supraterritorial collectivities. At best groups such as Kurds, Buddhists, women, peasants, gays and cosmopolitans have obtained some participation and accountability in the governance of global affairs indirectly, by using national-state-territorial channels. However, these supraterritorial publics have received little recognition in their own right, with specific positions and procedures to ensure their distinctive involvement in global politics.

Taking in sum educational shortcomings, institutional failings, structural subordinations, and under-recognition of supraterritorial publics, the governance of contemporary globalisation has had very weak democratic groundings. Emergent polycentric regulation of global affairs can in no serious way be characterised as 'rule

by the people'. Understandably, as noted earlier, these democratic deficits have prompted much disquiet. Indeed, it may be asked whether current directions of globalisation are politically sustainable in the absence of significant efforts to democratise the process.

The democratisation of globalisation could be pursued through a number of channels. These avenues include programmes of public education; measures to improve transparency and accountability of regulatory bureaucracies; reform of judicial procedures; steps to expand and upgrade civil society activities; redistribution of resources in favour of structurally disadvantaged groups; and revision of constitutions to recognise supraterritorial publics. However, the rest of this paper looks more narrowly at how reoriented practices by political parties might bring greater democracy to global affairs. This focus on political parties does not imply that other approaches to upgrading democracy in global politics are less worthy. On the contrary, effective democratisation of globalisation probably requires concurrent initiatives from multiple complementary angles, including but not limited to changes in the organisation and activities of political parties.

### *Political parties*

As indicated at the outset of this discussion, a political party is understood here to be a formal organisation that supports candidates (that is, politicians) for elected public office. Parties may be based on any of several rationales. For example, in the tradition of many historical party formations in Western Europe, a party may be rooted in ideology and a particular vision of the good society. On the other hand, parties may also have sectoral foundations, in cases where they pursue the political interests of a given social group, be it an ethnic, regional, religious, or other circle. Alternatively, a political party may find its glue in the charismatic personality of its leader(s). In other instances the *raison d'être* of the party may extend no further than to serve the professional ambitions of its career politicians. Or several of these factors may figure in combination. Whatever the bonds that unite their members, however, all political parties seek to take and retain elected public office.

A specific distinction is therefore maintained in the present analysis between a political party and a civil society association. Political parties look to occupy positions of public authority, while civil society bodies aim to shape societal rules without capturing public regulatory institutions. To be sure, grey areas may arise in the case of fringe political parties (such as most ultra-nationalist formations) that have little or no prospect of winning elections. At the same time certain civil society associations (for example, a number of trade unions) have maintained close affiliations with political parties. Thus, as ever, no definition is crystal clear. However, the broad distinction between political parties and civil society is sustainable. The differentiation is also analytically useful in an investigation of democracy, inasmuch as political parties give priority to strategies of indirect and representative democracy, whereas civil society associations tend to pursue more deliberative and directly participatory routes to popular sovereignty.

So now to the specific concern at hand: what can political parties do to effect more participation and control by the demos in the construction of rules for the more global world of the twenty-first century? The rest of this paper considers what political parties might contribute: both through traditional territorial-national organisations; and through international, regional and global frameworks.

### **Country-based parties in a more global world**

As noted briefly in the preceding survey of democratic deficits in contemporary globalisation, traditional territorial political parties (that is, those constructed around a country unit in order to pursue office in the national and local governments of that land) have so far failed to generate much public participation in and public control over the governance of global affairs. The following paragraphs identify five main ways that country-based political parties have fallen short in this regard and suggest corrective steps under each of these headings that could raise their democratic inputs to a more global world. The third section of this paper then goes on to argue that – however far country-based bodies might raise their inputs of global democracy – political parties must in current circumstances of polycentric governance also organise beyond country-state-nation units far more than they have done to date.

### *Educating publics*

As mentioned before, traditional territorial parties have – along with other actors in contemporary politics like schools, the mass media and civil society associations – generally failed to make publics sufficiently conscious of expanding global social spaces and the ways that global issues are and are not governed. Questions of global policy have rarely figured prominently – and often not at all – in party conferences, rallies and workshops. Likewise, global affairs have usually featured marginally, if at all, in party research and training programmes, in the selection and promotion of candidates, in a party's press conferences and other public communications, and in campaign manifestos and debates. True, certain parties have raised public understanding of certain global problems, for example, in the case of Green parties with respect to planetary ecological challenges. For the most part, however, political parties have neglected their many opportunities for public education on global matters.

Indeed, this consistent failure to address global issues has arguably contributed to a widespread loss of stature for traditional political parties in the public eye. Concurrently with accelerated globalisation in recent decades, most established liberal democratic states have experienced significant reductions in party memberships and voter turnouts. Many factors have prompted this decline, of course, but among them are public perceptions that established party systems have lost relevance in addressing the priority issues of the day. In turn, a good part of that apparent loss of relevance arguably lies in the neglect, especially by the large mainstream political parties, substantially to engage the global realities of contemporary society.

This diagnosis of the problem evokes its own prescription, namely, that traditional territorial political parties should give greater attention to global affairs. Parties would thereby contribute more to public awareness of these vital issues and at the same time reaffirm their relevance for the twenty-first century. The fact that traditional political parties operate on a country-state-nation scale does not mean that they must restrict their policy vision to territorially bounded issues in their land of operation. On the contrary, parties arguably have a societal obligation proactively to reshape the agenda of public debate so that it catches up with the more global world

that has emerged over the past half-century. Indeed, for parties to perpetuate (inadvertently or otherwise) territorialist and statist myths is highly damaging given the challenges that globalisation poses *inter alia* for material welfare, ecological integrity, the rule of law, cultural identities and social cohesion.

Country-based parties could take a number of specific measures to become more effective agents of public education on global affairs. For example, party meetings, publicity materials and electoral campaigns could more regularly and prominently discuss global policy issues such as climate change, governing the Internet, and global taxes to finance development. In addition, competence to handle global issues could be made a significant consideration when parties select their candidates. Political parties could also commit more resources to research and training that would enhance the capacities of politicians and their staffs to address questions related to, for instance, global migration flows, global disease control, and global arms trade. More globally educated candidates and party workers would in turn, through the wider political process, foster more globally educated (and thereby more democratically empowered) publics.

### *Occupying state office*

As well as by educating publics, country-based political parties can fulfil a democratising function in today's more global world by doing what they have always done: namely, gaining and holding executive power in national and local governments. As indicated earlier, globalisation has by no means sidelined territorial governments. On the contrary, states remain key actors in the regulation of global relations. Even district councils in small countries face decisions concerning, for example, contracts with global companies and implementation of global resolutions on the environment. Hence control of national and local governments gives political parties major opportunities to shape globalisation in line with the popular will.

To date, however, political parties have generally underplayed these possibilities to democratise global affairs. For one thing, as already stressed, parties have mostly failed to promote public understanding of and deliberations about global policy issues, so that there is little well-formed popular will upon which a democratic



state could act. Lacking awareness of global relations and their governance, publics rarely press politicians holding public office to act on the problems.

Nor have elected representatives in national and local government shown themselves particularly inclined to rise to global challenges. Indeed, politicians have all too often depicted globalisation as an omnipotent external force over which the state can exercise no control. In this vein, countless ministers have blamed various ills of their country on global competition, global technologies, global epidemics, and global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Yet politicians hereby underestimate their potential influence and abdicate their democratic responsibility. To be sure, a number of global circumstances have constrained the range of choices available to states. Sovereignty in the old Westphalian sense of a state's claim to total authority over its realm is unavailable in the more global world of the twenty-first century. However, it is quite another thing to say that increased global connectivity has rendered governments prostrate. After all, states (especially stronger states) have considerable leeway in deciding whether, when and under what terms to accede to global regulatory regimes. Likewise, most except the weaker states have notable scope in determining economic, social and environmental policies vis-à-vis global capital. Moreover, however global the world may have become, states today jealously retain their near-monopoly positions in governing migration and military affairs, yielding only marginal roles to supranational and private regulatory mechanisms. Also, globalisation has given states (especially the major states) various new tools and enhanced opportunities for influence with, for instance, electronic mass media, global currencies, and, even, satellite surveillance.

Given this continued importance, the state remains a prize well worth contesting in a more global world. By winning national and local government office, traditional territorial political parties can substantially mould the formulation and execution of a state's policies on global issues. If the victorious parties are genuinely democratic forces, then the governments that they lead can steer globalisation in popularly preferred directions. Again, however, to achieve this democratic purpose country-based political parties need to give global issues due priority and to equip their staffs and memberships with competence to handle global agendas.

### *Scrutinising state policies on global affairs*

Yet political parties do not have to occupy national and local executive office in order to democratise state policies on globalisation. In addition, parties in opposition – as well as critical voices within ruling parties – can play the role of democratic watchdog, scrutinising whether or not the government of the day is reflecting the popular will in its handling of global issues. In this way country-based political parties can contribute to democratic accountability in globalisation.

Regrettably, few traditional political parties have done much to exploit these democratising possibilities. As ever, to be sure, certain exceptions exist. For instance, a number of national politicians and parliaments have in recent years undertaken closer examination of their government's involvement in the Bretton Woods institutions (Halifax Initiative, 2004). However, this (modest) example stands out as a deviation from the norm of neglect. For instance, no country-based parties and their representatives in parliaments have performed systematic oversight of the important transgovernmental networks described earlier. Likewise, state bureaucracies have adopted most of their international commitments regarding global matters without reference to legislatures and the political parties that populate them.

Clearly parties could do much more in this area. Alongside (and sometimes in collaboration with) civil society associations and the mass media, political parties could be leading agents of public scrutiny over a state's involvement in global affairs. For example, party organisations and politicians could sponsor many more critical studies of a state's policies on, say, global environmental matters, global human rights questions or global debt problems. Party representatives in legislative bodies could use committee hearings and plenary debates to push for improved government action on given global matters. Likewise, opposition parties could make the incumbent government's record on governing global aspects of, say, trade or health a headline issue in election campaigns.

### *Engaging governance beyond the state*

Important though the measures just discussed may be, traditional political parties must not restrict their quest for public participation and public accountability in global governance to the state alone. Like other political actors in the twenty-first century, parties need to abandon outdated statist assumptions and reorient their practices to the emergent polycentric mode of governance. That means actively engaging the state, to be sure, but also other regulatory bodies. To remain effective in a more global world, country-based political parties must in addition attend to a host of suprastate and nonstate governance mechanisms.

Yet in this area, too, traditional political parties have to date generally failed to deliver. True, as indicated in the next section, certain national parliamentarians have built connections with certain global regulatory agencies like the World Bank and the WTO, but they have generally done so on their personal initiative. However, country-based political parties have not, as party organisations, pursued a policy of systematically engaging with suprastate institutions, let alone private regimes of global governance. A potentially important channel for conveying democratic voice to regulatory bodies beyond the state has therefore gone unutilised. Moreover, the lack of contact with suprastate and private agencies has exacerbated the parties' ignorance of governance outside the state. Conversely, too, the absence of links with parties has contributed to often poor understanding on the part of global bureaucracies like the IMF about political circumstances in the various member countries.

The failure of country-based political parties to engage governance institutions beyond the state becomes all the more striking when compared with the record of civil society associations in this respect. Countless business forums, community groups, faith-based movements, labour unions, NGOs and think tanks have developed substantive relationships with the various multilateral development banks, UN organs, the WTO, the OECD, and even a few private regulatory bodies like ICANN. In response to these initiatives, many suprastate governance institutions have set up civil society liaison bureaus, developed systematic procedures for civil society consultation, and issued staff guides for relations with civil society associations.

These official mechanisms remain inadequate in many respects, but at least they exist in rudimentary form.

In marked contrast, global regulatory bodies have constructed nothing of the sort for relations with political parties. This is principally because, contrary to civil society organisations, parties have placed the suprastate agencies under no concerted pressure to engage. It seems telling that, as of 2003, IMF headquarters devoted half a dozen staff to civil society matters, while only one junior official had a half-time responsibility for parliamentary liaison across the entire world.

In short, if country-based political parties are to reaffirm their promise as major democratic forces in a more global world, they really must catch up with the realities of polycentric governance. Their traditional statist orientations and practices are not enough for the twenty-first century and must be supplemented with systematic efforts to bring public voice and public accountability to the many suprastate and nonstate sites of regulation in contemporary governance of global affairs.

### *Promoting global equality*

Yet however educated the publics and however improved the institutional processes, greater democracy will not prevail in the more global world of the twenty-first century unless the previously described structural inequalities are also addressed. If veritable ‘rule by the people’ is to hold sway in global politics, then all social categories (countries, classes, cultures, genders, races, urban/rural sectors, sexualities, age groups and so on) must have equivalent possibilities of involvement in the governance of transplanetary affairs. Partly that requires changes in institutional processes (like voting systems and consultation procedures) to ensure that various structurally subordinated circles obtain due voice in the regulation of globalisation. Beyond institutional changes, greater political equality also requires greater economic equality, which in turn necessitates a major global-scale redistribution of resources.

In this aspect of the democratisation of globalisation, too, traditional territorial political parties have generally done little. To be sure, a host of socialist and communist parties have historically championed the cause of underclasses. In more

recent decades many parties have proactively sought to increase the involvement of women and racial minorities. However, despite some internationalist rhetoric, such initiatives by political parties have in practice focused on reducing inequalities within the country at hand rather than in a larger global polity. As for progressive global redistribution, political parties in Northern countries have (apart from a handful of endorsements of the proposed Tobin tax on currency transactions) rarely gone beyond advocacy of modest resource transfers via international development assistance. Meanwhile political parties in Southern countries have generally lacked the means to pursue concerted campaigns for more ambitious global redistribution.

Once again the diagnosis of failings yields a clear corrective prescription: in order to advance democracy in global affairs, political parties should promote institutional changes and resource redistributions in the direction of greater global social equality. However, this remedy is easier identified than implemented. In particular, so long as traditional political parties maintain a territorial organisation and principally serve country-based constituencies, it is hard to see how global equality could come to rank among their priority concerns.

### *Recognising peoples beyond the territorial nation*

Likewise, the territorial orientation of traditional political parties forms a structural impediment to progress on the fourth type of democratic deficit mentioned earlier, that is, the need to provide participation and accountability for a variety of publics, including those that do not take a territorial-national form. Traditional political parties assume that ‘the people’ in ‘rule by the people’ is the national community that inhabits the country at hand. Territorial parties cater to supraterritorial types of demos (such as those based on world religions, global class solidarities, or humanity as a whole) only secondarily, if at all.

Certain exceptions to this overall neglect are found in respect of diasporas. For instance, a number of country-based political parties in Africa have received significant funding from co-nationals resident abroad. Ghana has even known an ‘Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere Party’ (EGLE) that won one parliamentary seat in

the 1993 elections. Many states now allow those of their citizens based outside the country to vote in national elections.

However, traditional parties have done little to attend to supraterritorial publics of a non-national kind. To obtain democratic voice these 'peoples' have tended to desert political parties and turn instead to transnational social movements like Vía Campesina (for global peasant solidarity), the International Lesbian and Gay Association, and the World March of Women. Unfortunately these global civil society actors have developed few links with political parties, connections that could make parties more sensitive to plural and hybrid identities in contemporary politics. Indeed, the World Social Forum, a major initiative to create a global public space for a host of civil society movements, has in its Charter of Principles (point 9) specifically excluded delegates from political parties.

In sum, while traditional political parties certainly do not stand in contradiction to democracy in global politics, they have on the whole thus far failed to realise their potentials as forces for bringing greater 'rule by the people' to transplanetary affairs. As indicated above, country-based parties offer, in principle, some of the most promising and practicable possibilities for a democratisation of globalisation. The main difficulty is getting established political parties and party systems to discard old assumptions about the nature of governance and to address the new realities of a more global world.

### **Beyond Traditional Political Parties**

Yet no matter how far traditional political parties might pursue the democratisation of globalisation, their efforts can never be enough by themselves. However much country-based parties might change their practices, by definition they have a primarily territorial orientation that inhibits them from completely adequately handling global issues. Invariably, traditional parties mainly operate in a country sphere (to the relative neglect of other realms); they mainly engage the corresponding state apparatus (to the relative neglect of other sites of regulation); and they mainly relate to the corresponding national demos (to the relative neglect of other peoples).

In order more fully to address global spaces, governance beyond the state, and publics beyond the territorial nation, political parties also need to organise themselves on more than country-state-nation lines. The rest of this paper considers three steps towards such a broader orientation, namely, the development of international, regional and global party organisations. Overall it is concluded that these alternative party forms offer important possibilities for democratising global politics but limited immediate impacts. For the time being civil society activities beyond the country-state-nation hold more promise for advancing global democracy than international, regional and global parties.

### *International Party Networks*

One readily available path to develop more globally oriented political parties is to build international links between established country-based organisations. Such networks allow traditional parties to exchange views, pool expertise and coordinate actions with partners across the planet, including on global issues in particular. International collaboration among parties can furthermore have democratising effects if it promotes more public awareness of global affairs, more opportunities for public participation and accountability in global policymaking, and greater equality and identity recognition in global politics.

Like many global activities, the origins of international party organisations can be traced to the late-nineteenth century. The International Working Men's Association (First International) operated across Europe and North America in 1864-76. The Second International linked country-based socialist and labour parties in 1889-1916, being succeeded in the 1920s by several rival bodies. The Third or Communist International (Comintern) institutionalised a world movement of territorial communist parties in 1919-43, followed briefly by the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in 1947-56.

Several international associations of country-based political parties are active today. Following the footsteps of the Second International and its interwar successors, the London-based Socialist International (SI) currently involves 148 country-based parties. The Fourth International, founded by Trotskyists in 1938, persists on a

smaller scale and without an official secretariat. The Liberal International (LI), established in 1947 and also maintaining headquarters in London, includes full and observer member organisations from 54 countries. The Oslo-based International Democrat Union (IDU), launched in 1983, currently groups 47 country-based parties with conservative and Christian Democrat orientations. The youngest international party association, the Global Green Network, was formally created in 2001, although regular intercontinental communications among country-based ecological parties dates from the early 1990s.

The various party internationals have regularly considered matters of global public policy. For example, the Socialist International has supported committees, campaigns and working groups concerning *inter alia* poor country debt problems, migration, the Bretton Woods institutions, the Kyoto Protocol, and the WTO. The Fourth International has treated contemporary capitalism and workers struggles as distinctly global issues. The Liberal International has repeatedly addressed ‘the challenges of globalisation’. The Global Greens reveal a transplanetary orientation in their very name as well as in specific attention accorded to matters such as climate change and nuclear proliferation.

In addition, other international networking among members of country-based political parties has occurred through meetings of national legislators. In this vein the Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has operated since 1889. The London-based Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), dating from 1911, now links some 170 state and substate legislatures from 53 countries. Both bodies have handled a number of global issues, including disarmament, financing for development, HIV/AIDS, and trade. In addition Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), an association involving over 1,300 representatives from 114 national legislatures, has worked with various UN agencies since the late 1970s.

Several other international networks of country-based parliamentarians have focused on specific global problems. In this vein the Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE), launched in 1989, now groups representatives from over a hundred national parliaments. Since 2000 a Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNWB) has involved several hundred elected representatives from



around 50 countries. Beginning in 2003 the IPU and the European Parliament have jointly convened an annual Parliamentary Conference on the WTO with legislators from around 80 countries.

Yet the extent of this international cooperation among country-based parties must not be exaggerated. After decades of operations these international associations have made only very modest of impacts on global politics. Relatively few members, politicians and staff of political parties have devoted major time and energy to these networks. All of the party internationals have remained poorly resourced, with tiny staffs and budgets. Even the oldest and largest of these bodies, the Socialist International, currently survives on an annual budget of only £1 million.

In short, a much larger scale of international networking among country-based parties would be required in order to advance a notable democratisation of globalisation through these channels. The party internationals would need to do much more than has occurred so far to raise public awareness of globalisation and its governance, to engage suprastate and private regulatory institutions, to combat global inequalities, and to provide platforms for supraterritorial as well as territorial publics. In principle the possibilities of international networking among traditional political parties are substantial, but in practice the results to date have been negligible.

### *Regional Parties*

One step towards greater global democracy through political parties could be to move away from country-based organisations. After all, while international party networks may operate globally, their constituent elements still derive from – and work primarily within – a country-state-nation framework. However, political parties could also be organised in relation to other kinds of geographical units, including regional spaces in particular. Indeed, several of the party internationals also organise their members in regional sub-groupings.

As noted earlier in this paper, regionalisation is a major contemporary trend alongside globalisation in contemporary history. Considerable regulation of global flows (in terms of communications, finance, investment, trade, etc.) has developed

over recent decades through regional governance apparatuses such as the EU and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). Many advocates of regionalism have argued that such frameworks offer major – perhaps even the greatest – opportunities to harness global flows in the public interest. From this perspective regionalisation would be a primary strategy for the democratisation of globalisation.

Thus far two regional governance projects have acquired directly elected parliamentary bodies. Representatives of the European Parliament of the EU (now numbering 732 in total) have been directly elected every five years since 1979. Voters in the six member countries of the Central American Common Market select 132 representatives to the Central American Parliament, which has convened in Guatemala City since 1991.

Not surprisingly, the emergence of directly elected regional assemblies has encouraged the development of regionally organised political parties to contest the seats. In the EU, for example, a distinctly regional European People's Party (EPP) has operated since 1976, the Party of European Socialists (PES) was formed in 1992, and the European Free Alliance (EFA) was founded in 2004 to represent stateless nations across the region. Other Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are organised in looser coalitions of national parties. So far the Central American Parliament has not acquired distinctly regional political parties, although the deputies have formed three main international blocs.

Meanwhile a number of other regional governance frameworks have gained indirectly elected representative bodies with members that are appointed from the national legislatures of the member states. Examples include the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (inaugurated in 1949), the Andean Parliament of the Andean Community (1979), the Consultative Assembly of the Arab Maghreb Union (1989), the Parliamentary Forum of the Southern African Development Community (1996), the East African Legislative Assembly of the East African Community (2001), the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (2002), and the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union (2004). In addition, a stand-alone Latin American Parliament has since 1987 linked legislatures of that region, but without constituting part of a larger regional governance apparatus.

Thus far these indirectly elected regional bodies have not called forth distinctly regional party organisations, although such a development might be anticipated in the course of further regionalisation in the future.

However, neither the existing regional political parties nor the regional parliaments have as yet realised significant democratising impacts on globalisation. At best they have occasionally brought global issues to public attention. Still more rarely they have scrutinised a regional body's handling of globalisation (e.g. the European Commission's policies in WTO talks). Like the secretariats of international party networks, the bureaus of regional political parties have had very few resources at their disposal. Moreover, the regional party organisations have generally maintained at best incidental and loose links with individual members and constituency branches, thereby generating little democratic participation and accountability for the grassroots. Indeed, the vast majority of EU citizens are unaware even of the existence of the EPP, PES and EFA.

In sum, then, the proposition to further a democratisation of global politics through regional parties and party systems has an appealing underlying logic in some respects, but has as yet delivered little substance. Fuller realisation of this potential would require larger and more influential regional governance instruments, stronger and directly elected regional parliamentary assemblies, and well-resourced regional party organisations that maintained close connections with citizens. Such institutions would seem unlikely to develop very quickly, particularly outside Europe.

### *Global Political Parties*

If effective regional political parties are at best a project for the medium term, global political parties as instruments for transplanetary democracy are today an even more remote prospect. In contrast to international party networks, which assemble country-based organisations that strive to hold state power, distinctly global political parties would promote candidates for elected global governance offices. Although this idea has some support (cf. Patomäki and Ulvila, 2006), it hardly seems a practicable option for the time being.

To be sure, contemporary globalisation has created pressing needs for much more regulation with a transplanetary scope, and the major expansion of global-scale governance witnessed over the past half-century looks set to continue into the future. Demands for democratic participation in and public accountability of global regulatory institutions will carry on mounting, the more so if – as seems quite possible in the years to come – global taxes begin to generate own resources for transplanetary governance agencies. The stage would then be set for cries of ‘no taxation without representation’ at the global level.

Yet thus far no global-scale regulatory agency, public or private, has shown any sign of including a directly elected representative arm. No UN Legislature, IMF Assembly, OECD Congress, or ICANN Parliament is in prospect. Hence the *raison d’être* for distinctly global political parties is – and looks to remain – decidedly absent. Such parties will not form if they have no seats to contest. The democratisation of global-scale governance mechanisms must therefore be sought through channels other than a transplanetary party system.

In any case the construction of elected representative bodies attached to global-scale governance agencies raises highly problematic issues. For example, how would constituencies within a global arena be drawn: on country, regional and/or supraterritorial lines? What electoral formula would be used for global assemblies: one person, one vote; or some kind of weighting (and if so which one)? How would transplanetary ballots be conducted and monitored? What regime of campaign financing would apply to global political parties?

Moreover, beyond these practical difficulties for global representative democracy through global political parties lie deeper cultural problems. One such systemic challenge is constructing a sufficiently strong general ethos of global citizenship, in which a large proportion of humanity would frame its sense of political rights and duties substantially in terms of a transplanetary polity and therefore find it meaningful to engage in global party politics. After all, country-based party systems did not become effective mechanisms of participation and accountability until major proportions of territorial populations directed significant political commitments to the nation-state. Regional political parties have limited prospects as engines of global

democratisation so long as regional populations have developed only a shallow if any sense of regional citizenship, as evidenced in low voter turnouts to elections of the European Parliament. Although global citizenship is arguably incipient and growing in contemporary politics, it is at this point in time even further from being a major force than regional citizenship.

Finally, the construction of global political parties would face huge challenges of navigating cultural diversity. How could one devise a single coherent transplanetary regime of parties and elected offices that equitably accommodated the wide variety of political cultures across the planet? Even on the smaller scale of territorial states, party systems have often marginalised and excluded populations like many indigenous peoples for whom this modern model of democracy is culturally alien. Indeed, in some cases whole countries – as in many parts of Africa and Asia – have struggled to construct working party systems. Great care would need to be taken to construct global political parties that delivered veritable participation and accountability to all, and not just to a modernist elite. However, the necessary tools of intercultural communication and negotiation are not yet available for effective pluriversal politics of this kind.

In sum, then, contemporary governance of global affairs has major needs for supraterritorial frameworks of democratic mobilisation, but the situation is not ripe for global political parties to fill this niche. For the time being global civil society associations hold the greater promise in this regard.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has reflected on the role of political parties in promoting democratic governance of global affairs. Contemporary rapid growth of transplanetary and supraterritorial social connectivity has significantly reshaped the contours of governance and created corresponding needs to recast democratic practices. Political parties continue to offer important democratic potential in the more global world of the twenty-first century, but they must adjust to the changes in order to realise this promise.

Many contributions to a democratisation of globalisation can come from traditional territorial political parties. Country-based parties can advance global democracy: by educating publics; by occupying state office; by scrutinising state policies; by engaging governance beyond the state; by promoting global equality; and by recognising peoples other than territorial nations. In short, traditional party systems can be relevant to public participation and public accountability in global politics if they suitably reorient their conceptions, priorities and practices.

At the same time, as much as possible should be done to promote new types of party formations beyond country-state-nation units. As stressed above, the effectiveness of international, regional and global party organisations as agents of democratic globalisation will remain limited so long as they lack the resources and the popular bases to generate veritable public participation and public accountability on any significant scale. Nevertheless, international and regional party constructions in particular hold potentials that warrant pursuit.

Yet however much might be achieved towards global democracy through political parties, it is clear that they can fill only part of the picture, particularly so long as suprastate and private regulatory bodies lack elected representative offices. Even then democratic global politics would require, amongst other things, a fully operative global human rights regime, more globally oriented public education and mass media, and a vibrant global civil society. Party systems are no more a panacea for future global politics than for past territorial politics.

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## **Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation**

University of Warwick  
Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

Tel: +44 (0)24 7657 2533  
Fax: +44 (0)24 7657 2548  
Email: [csg@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:csg@warwick.ac.uk)  
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