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Populism: Threat or Opportunity to Global Governance

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Abstract

Populism has opened up new avenues by bringing in different stakeholders and participants in the governance of a country. With globalization, a new liberal policy regime ushered in many countries. It called for the minimal state as the new public management. It means an arrangement of a cooperative approach along with the coordination of individual states. It can also be interpreted as creating more space for civil society and citizens' participation in governance. With this paradigm shift, global governance has emerged as a problem-solving arrangement for states which otherwise was not effectively addressed by individual states. It facilitates states to implement ordered rules through structured decision-making. This has paved the way for the rise of populism. In the contemporary political system, populism has taken a pivotal position over the years. While populism strengthens democracy with more political representation, it also poses a threat to accountability which is the core idea of governance. The entry explores the idea of populism in the context of global governance. It intends to traverse whether populism aids global governance or is a threat that needs to be checked.

Keywords Populism -Global governance -Accountability

Introduction

The new era of governance emerged with the neoliberal philosophy. It ushered in a paradigm shift in governance. There was a call for minimalist role of the state with a shout-out for “rolling back of the state as much as you can.” From the 1980s onward, there was a change in the discourse of governance and its activities. It not only had a profound impact on academic and intellectual pursuits

but also on the debates that sparked the political and economic task of governance. With globalization, a new liberal policy regime ushered in many countries. It called for the minimal state as the new public management. It means an arrangement of a cooperative approach along with the coordination of individual states. It can also be interpreted as creating more space for civil society and citizen's participation in governance. With this changed scenario, global governance has emerged as a problem-solving arrangement for states which otherwise was not effectively addressed by individual states. It facilitates states to implement ordered rules through structured decision-making. This has paved the way for the rise of populism. There were also many new ways of governing that emerged and were debated. In a contemporary political system, populism has taken a pivotal position in the political system over the years. While populism strengthens democracy with more political representation, it also poses a threat to accountability which is the core idea of governance. The entry explores the idea of populism in the context of global governance. It intends to traverse whether populism aids global governance or is a threat that needs to be checked.

Globalization and Global Governance

With globalization, the world has become smaller. It is a fact that globalization is the “umbrella paradigm” which has an impeccable impact on the society, economy, and politics of the world. Globalization is the process by which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world have significant consequences for other parts of the globe. It extends beyond economic interdependence to include the dilution of time and space dimensions as a result of the spread of information technology (Yusuf and Stiglitz [2000](#)).

A period of more than three decades has seen globalization change “the rules of the game” for the use of state power, the role of multilateral agencies, and relations among and between states. The state's role as controller of the national economy, as the principal provider of goods and services to citizens, and as the engine of national development has largely been delimited in the face of the increasing inability of states to exercise sovereign control over internal economic activities and also cross-border economic transactions. Since the changing global scenario, policymaking in all parts of the world has changed into a global stance. The political system is influenced not only by the national environment but also by the global environment. These create serious challenges to the nation-state on how to make effective political decisions in the international policy environment and how to manage accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in governance. With the involvement of a number of nonstate actors in the function of the government, the modern government is losing control over governing a nation.

The governments are aware that to play an important role in the international arena, it is vital to improving their governance in an efficient manner. But the government is facing serious challenges because of conflicting interests among the state and nonstate actors. This has a negative implication at the international level. The government finds it difficult to maintain a strong position in the international platform. Today, policymaking is inter-wined at local, national, and international levels.

Global governance is a broad, dynamic, and complex process of interactive decision-making at the global level that involves formal and informal mechanisms as well as governmental and nongovernmental bodies. States and governments remain the first institution for articulating public interests and people of the worldwide community as a whole, but global governance also involves

intergovernmental and, sometimes, supranational bodies. Global policy is formed by a system of horizontal and vertical interactions during which officials in several branches of state work with counterparts in other countries also as with activists, scientists, bankers, and others outside government. The term global governance is usually used more narrowly to ask the institutions through which these interactions happen.

Global governance is the management of worldwide policies in the absence of a central government. Global governance differs from international anarchy in that it involves a sustained level of cooperation and a preference for collective action. Thus, in the global governance system, states cooperate voluntarily because it is in their interest to do so.

It refers to a wide variety of cooperative problem-solving arrangements whose common characteristic is that they facilitate “governance,” in the sense of the coordination of social life, rather than “government,” meaning ordered rule operating through a system of enforceable decisions. Such arrangements became an increasingly prominent feature of worldwide politics since the top of the conflict, particularly in response to, but also, to some extent, in an attempt to shape, the process of globalization (Heywood [2011](#)). Global governance has therefore emerged out of an acceptance by states that in a growing number of policy areas the problems they confront cannot be effectively addressed by individual states acting alone.

The globalization process has opened up new kinds of governance such as regional institutions and added new actors to the process such as nongovernmental organizations and transnational arbiters and regulators (Woods [2000](#)). Within the realm of globalization, where pivotal concepts like the market economy, privatization, and liberalization hold sway, two primary groups of economic players wield substantial influence on the global stage. These are transnational corporations, which play a central role in investment, production, and global trade, and international banks and financial institutions, which dominate the world of finance. The nation-states remain important political actors in the international political system but have retreated considerably in the international economic arena.

Globalization may bring new economic opportunities but also have new political, social, technological, and institutional complexities for poorer countries as well. In a globalizing society, governments must work in tandem with the private sector, civil society organizations, and public interest groups to develop institutions that support and sustain economic and social development that is equitable, sustainable, and poverty alleviating. However, issues of accountability and control often become problematic in such public-private partnerships. Governments in countries seeking to participate in and benefit from globalization must increasingly assume new roles as catalysts for economic and social development through better infrastructure support to the market players, enablers of productivity and efficiency, regulators ensuring that economies remain open and equitable, and stimulators of human resource development. The growth of such groups has also been facilitated by the emergence of a framework of worldwide governance, which has both provided civil society groups with sources of funding and given them the chance to interact in policy formulation and, sometimes, policy implementation (Heywood [2011](#)). Taking this opportunity, many civil society organizations particularly NGOs are mushrooming. In the late 1980s, a number of civil society organizations raised subsequently to play an active role in the welfare of the state. Because of their pivotal role in the development processes of society, they have been considered as the “Third Sector,” the first and second sectors being government and market, respectively.

Rise of Populism

The term populism is derived from the Latin term “Populus” which means people. Populism is all about the concerns of the people. Populism is not a new concept. It has been there for centuries. The core concept of populism revolves around the people, the elite, and the general will. Bonikowski and Gidron opine that populism can most usefully be defined as a form of political interaction “predicated on a moral vilification of elites and a concomitant veneration of the common people” (Bonikowski and Gidron [2016](#)).

Modern populism rose after the second World War when people were raised against totalitarianism. The idea of liberal democracy emerged as the alternative for it. People opted for liberal democracy on three grounds. First, liberal democracy accepts that societies have conflicting and different opinions and values. Second, it seeks to accommodate the differences and seek a common ground to address the issues. And third, liberal democracy is based on rule of law which ensures that the rights of the minorities are sustained. Liberal democracy provides the stability that the people sought. However, it did not solve everything. There was a huge income gap and the inequality increased manifold. Political corruptions and scandals were rampant in most countries. This resulted in resentment among the masses. Hoffmann states that this anger is to be understood not simply in terms of the individual citizen’s personal, economic, psychological, or cultural characteristics, but also as a collective reaction to failures of representation (Hoffmann [1956](#)). If the majority of the people feel neglected, then they can raise their voices against the existing leaders. So, people started looking for leaders who can take care of their needs. Populist leaders took this opportunity to fight those politicians that govern badly and show concern for the issues of the people. Populist leaders promise to bring change in the life of the people. Generally, modern populist leaders provide simple solutions to complicated issues. These kinds of leaders feel that they are above all the institutions which are ruled by few like banks, large corporations, or mass media. Populism was seen in many countries in the past. In contemporary times, Europe has become the center of the populist idea. Whereas previous populisms were specifically national in character, this new populism has assumed a more international form (Cox [2018](#)).

With globalization, populism has upsurged with increasing resentment among the people. Globalization was an expectation that it will improve the economy and that development will take place rapidly. In fact, many countries saw the kind of development and economic growth which was the goal of globalization. But, the benefits of globalization are uneven and benefits were not equally distributed. The stability which people sought after the Second World War is not anymore there. So, the wave of populism has spread to many other countries which include developed and developing countries equally. The USA, Greece, Italy, Venezuela, Brazil, France, Indonesia, Egypt, and India are some examples of recent times. On this note, it is imperative to point out that it is not only economic inequality that gave raise to populism. There were issues of lack of governance which could not fulfill the goals and objectives of the needs of the people. The bad governance by the political leaders and lack of state capacity to fulfill the obligations toward the people resulted in mistrust and declining faith in the government. Thus, it raised questions about the state institutions and their capacity to address the issues of its citizens. This failure led to the collapse of many governments and the ruling party. So, the alternative to the traditional parties’ people perceives a change in the new populist parties to govern them.

Populism a Threat or Opportunity to Global Governance

With the new liberal perspective of the minimalist state, there was a subsequent change in the governance of a country. Neoliberalism is an outburst of disillusionment with the welfare state. Before globalization, liberal democracies across the world including India started voicing cynicism about the hitherto dominant paradigm of the Welfare State. The liberal democratic welfare state did not achieve the goals which it set out. Rather it has propelled income disparities, socioeconomic inequities, and unemployment leading to a spiraling crime graph.

The gap between the elite and the masses was evident and could no longer be ignored. The political leaders, bureaucrats, and officials indulged in corrupt practices and were bloated, lethargic, and not at all concerned with the issues of common citizens. Further, the state tentacles had spread everywhere and people were said to be suffering from overstatism.

Infused with the liberal Zeitgeist of the time, “global governance” began to emerge as a perspective on world politics as well as a new approach to managing international affairs (Dingwerth and Pattberg [2006](#)). Global governance is also seen as an arrangement where the issues of states which were not addressed effectively by the individual states can be solved with more collaboration. It can also be interpreted as creating more space for civil society and citizens’ participation in governance. It also means that a space has been created which was earlier limited to liberal institutions. With the liberal institutions’ failure to deliver the expectations of the people, populism is the alternative that emerged. It is expected to work for the common will.

Populism can pave way for more political representation and strengthen democracy. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argued that populists can perform an important role in politicizing politics, making clear that policies do indeed create winners and losers, and these decisions on who wins and who loses should be made by elected rather than unelected bodies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser [2018](#)). A heterogeneity of power and preferences have increased with the shift of power from polarity to multipolarity. So, we see a more fragmented and diverse power in global governance. This new global governance is strongly contested, less universal, less liberal, and more fragmented (Mathew [2017](#)). A space has been created which was earlier limited to the liberal institutions. As a result of the rise of global governance, new populism emerged. It is expected to work for the common will.

Governance has become susceptible to populist politics when such leaders form the government. With the politics of opposition and interest groups, populist fails to adhere to the commitments toward common will. It does not transmit the interests and grievances of majority of the masses into significant policies and measures. A recent example is BREXIT in 2016 when the British people voted in a referendum to leave the European Union. Populists used convincing slogans to support the BREXIT. These were simple, clear words that many people found appealing. Shortly after the referendum, it became apparent that many of the slogans were not entirely true. After a wave of clarification about the consequences of the exit, many voters regretted their decision. Similarly, in the United States, populist leaders rose to power largely but not exclusively through anti-immigration policies. However, they lost their popularity because of their agreement with the demands of predatory financial capitalism. Taggart opines that “the empty heart of populism” is a reflection of the lack of core values that implies its essentially “chameleonic” nature (Taggart [2004](#)).

Global governance is pluralistic diversity in its functioning and comprehends all the differences. The challenge for populist leaders is the predicament to align their policies for the majority or the elite

few. As a result, the populist leaders fail to fulfill the very promises over which they had come to power. Rather, it should be the political will of the populist for the welfare of the silent majority first. Governance is more a child of cosmopolitan culture, and populism is more a child of the “people from somewhere world” (Stoker [2017](#)). Although populism has accommodated itself to politics as practiced in twenty-first-century democracies, it does so on its own terms and in a way that challenges the assumptions of the established political system (ibid.).

Concluding Remarks

The whole idea of governance from local to global is to ensure efficient and citizen-centric governance. Governance should be transparent and accountable to the citizens which is the essence of democracy. To ensure governance is transparent and accountable, an international governance system under the rule of law should be established. However, the challenge will remain to merge the rule of law with global governance and populism in vogue.

Policy planners and government institutions should open up avenues for more participation including grassroots-level stakeholders for a new system of international cooperation. Governments at the state and local levels should attempt to create the opportunity for wider participation of the different stakeholders in sync with the new system of international collaboration.

The governance of a nation also depends on the stability of a political system. A media tendency to portray populist leaders in a negative light may be not right all the time. Using of media to taint populist leaders is a common tactic by politicians leading to excitement and exploiting people’s political feelings. This phenomenon can be seen across the globe. Tainting populist leaders by politicians and media needs to be probed and proven.

Each populist leader has a different persona and way of doing things. It can often be seen that there is always a comparison between various populist leaders. The popular sentiments of the people should understand that to compare one populist leader with another is futile. This will unnecessarily lead to dissent and challenges in governance. Rather, voters and firms should advocate for government transparency to improve government responsiveness and ease investment (Stiglitz [1998](#); Besley and Burgess [2002](#)).

Global governance needs debates and deliberations to achieve the aims of governance which are ethical and accountable. Global actors should accept that only a transparent and ethical balance of power is the strength of global governance. Populism in regional governance needs to be seen as antagonistic to global governance as long as effective governance is placed at the regional level.

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