

State and politics in the transitional era of globalization: Twisting and turning toward authoritarian and hybrid regimes

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Abstract

Beyond its discontended thesis, globalization has had a difficult time in the last few years, owing to the global financial crises of 2008–2009 when its vacuous premises and promises were widely contested for being an unfair deal. The recent rise of nationalist and populist movements across the West and the East, boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic, now threatens its survival. However, globalization experts are largely divided in charting its future; while some predict the demise of the existing world order, others believe globalization will continue with some restructuring. By analyzing the global political dynamics and reviewing political and scholarly news and views, we argue that globalization is currently undergoing a transitional era with a new paradox—one characterized by the emergence of a multipolar world but with local identity and tradition-based politics. The upshot is that the state with the border is re-emerging alongside authoritarian and hybrid regimes.

KEYWORDS

anti-globalization, authoritarian regimes, borders, Brexit, China, COVID-19, end of globalization, globalization, international relations, local identities, multipolar world, new world order, pandemic, paradox, populism, soft power, state, tradition-based politics, transitional era

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Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama's (1989) *The End of History* intimated that human intellectual evolution had come to an end—regardless of communism, fascism, monarchy, or any other forms of government—with the vindication of Western liberal democracy as the ultimate form of government worthy of pursuit. Since the 1960s, economic globalization has accelerated exponentially thanks to the meteoric rise of multinational corporations and foreign direct investment. A growing global economy posed a serious challenge to the existing state system; it extended beyond national borders and the jurisdiction of nation-states (Göksel, 2004; Grande & Pauly, 2005; Greven & Pauly, 2000; Held et al., 1999; Kriesi et al., 2006). A series of monographs written in the late 1990s such as Strange's (1996) *The Retreat of the State*, Ohmae's (1996) *The End of the Nation State*, and Held and McGrew's (1998) *The End of the Old Order* prophesized the end of the nation-state as a looming reality. Concurrently, social globalization had extended and expanded its soft power through Hollywood, Harry Potter, McDonald's, and other outlets, indicating the dismantling of the border to usher in McWorld. In the name of cultural homogenization, the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of neoliberal globalization culminated into a Western hegemony (Barber, 1992; Ritzer, 2013).

The ensuing Western hegemony was criticized for its vacuous premises and empty promises. Stiglitz's masterpiece *Globalization and its Discontents* (2002) is one of the crucial pieces showcasing the dissatisfaction with globalization, particularly from developing countries or the so-called Global South condemning global trade and investment as “unfair.” Along with this, Brecher and others' (2000) *Globalization from Below*, Green and Griffith's (2002) piece in *International Affairs*’ “Globalization and its Discontents,” Eschle's (2004) “Constructing ‘the Anti-Globalisation Movement’” in the *International Journal of Peace Studies*, John's (2004) “Counter-Tribes, Global Protest and Carnivals of Reclamation” in *Peace Review*, and Pleyers's (2010) *Alter-Globalization* are among other examples that criticize and contest the liberal notion of Western hegemony.

The global financial crisis (GFC) of 2008–2009 challenged the hyper-growth of economic globalization, with several indicators showing that the global economy had slowed. In recent years, uprising nationalist and populist movements across Europe have posed a severe threat to globalization. Brexit, as well as Trump's election as president of the United States through his “America first” slogan, are two prominent examples of this trend. This pattern indicates a backlash against the perceived deleterious economic, social, and cultural consequences of accelerated globalization (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Flew, 2020; Goodhart, 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Öniş (2017) dubbed it the “age of anxiety” and predicted that troubles with liberal democracy would eventually lead to an illiberal world. Cooley and Nexon (2022) pointed out several serious crises of the existing global order, whereas Acharya (2014) argued for an end to the American hegemony.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the reaction against globalization, with “national,” and “localization” emerging as prominent rallying cries. As far as predicting the future of globalization in the post-COVID world is concerned, practitioners and experts are largely divided. According to some researchers—such as Nye Jr. (2020), Pearson (2020), Altman and Bastian (2021), and many others—the existing world order will remain mostly unchanged. In fact, Nye Jr. (2020) contends that COVID-19's putative role in spurring a “new world order” is exaggerated. On the other hand, some researchers foretell the demise of the existing liberal



international order in the wake of China's transition to a new world power in the post-COVID era. Both Bremmer (2020) and O'Sullivan (2021) believe that the current state of world politics is about to expire. Enderwick and Buckley (2020) have advocated for regionalization or a locally centered economy that can maintain growth in the face of hyper-growth in the current global system. Wang and Sun (2021) examined the U.S.–China trade relationship during the last few decades and concluded that localization and regionalization have filled the space left by the retreat of economic globalization. Zhao (2021), on the other hand, stressed China's unflagging desire to replace the existing U.S.-led international order with a new one.

Admittedly, identity and tradition-based politics through nationalism and populism are on the rise, and the state with the border is re-emerging through authoritarian and hybrid regimes. Against this backdrop, this study argues that globalization faces a transitional period for the short- or mid-term during which a multipolar world is the most likely outcome. More specifically, this article explores three critical issues in the globalization phenomenon: first, the status of the globalization phenomenon in the 21st century, particularly from the GFC of 2008–2009 to the COVID-19 pandemic; second, the defining aspects of the transitional era, especially the emergence of a multipolar world; and finally, the perception of politics and the state during that period.

This article is organized into five sections. After a brief introduction, we ask a crucial question: Is globalization at an end? For this, we have briefly discussed the shaky foundations of globalization after the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. This crisis cascaded into a series of events that challenged globalization: declining global trade volume, China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its deep integration into the manufacturing sector, right-wing populist and anti-immigrant movements across the EU, Brexit, and President Trump's demonization of globalization, among others. We then postulate a claim that a transitional era of globalization characterized by a multipolar world fashioned by the rising power of BRICS and Turkey is emerging. We proceed to examine the issue of COVID-19 in the context of globalization; while several nations experienced severe crises dealing with the pandemic and its aftereffects, globalization largely failed to provide a solution. The populist “my country first” slogan-cum-policy coupled with China's emergence as an important political player worldwide was a powerful backlash against globalization. We then explore the perception of the state and politics in the multipolar world and address pressing issues such as localization, tradition, and border in the future years. The article concludes on the broader implications of these developments for the future of neoliberal globalization.

IS GLOBALIZATION AT AN END?

While the concept of globalization, defined largely as the process through which capital, goods, services, and occasionally labor traverse national borders and assume transnational characteristics (Islam, 2015), has historical roots spanning centuries, the notion of globalization as a deliberate “project” characterized by a neoliberal trajectory emerged prominently after the 1970s (McMichael, 2017). This neoliberal “Globalization Project” represents a nascent worldview known as the “Washington Consensus” wherein global institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, G-7 nations, WTO, and various transnational corporations play central roles in organizing the world and its resources (Islam, 2015; McMichael, 2017). This formidable wave of globalization is frequently accompanied by the dissemination of associated preferences, ideologies, and even ethical principles across borders, thereby contributing to the transformation of local political structures, social dynamics, and cultural norms.

Scholars have contested and delved into centuries-long historical analyses and even drawn connections to the “Big Bang” for the genesis of globalization (Zinkina et al., 2019). However,



Wallerstein (2000) argued globalization started in 1450 and Zinkina and others (2019) assert that the inception of the global world system traced back to the “long sixteenth century.”¹ In the modern context, researchers aimed to trace the roots of globalization back to the latter half of the 19th century, frequently denoting it as the first phase of globalization that endured until the outbreak of World War I (Canals, 2010; Milanovic, 2003; Palley, 2018; Williamson, 1996, 1998). This is attributable to the substantial broad expansion of the international economy as Hirst and others (2015, p. 27) explain that the “current international economy has only recently become as open and integrated as the regime that prevailed from 1870 to 1914.” Following World War I, globalization entered a transitional phase characterized by a discernible backlash, notably marked by the adoption of protectionist measures by various nations, including the United States (Williamson, 1998).

The second phase of globalization emerged post-World War II and has persisted into the contemporary era. While some scholars sought to delineate a distinct third phase starting in the 1980s (Canals, 2010), its delineation became more pronounced during the era of hyper-globalization. The term hyper-globalization is largely used to signify the rapid rises in global trade volume, foreign direct investment, and capital flows particularly in the timeframe of 1990s and 2000s (Anderson & Obeng, 2021; Subramanian & Kessler, 2013), which is basically the heyday of neoliberal globalization project. For instance, the global trade volume bumping up its share of gross domestic product (GDP) from 38% to 61% between 1990 and 2008 (The World Bank, 2021). Although hyper-globalization is usually coined to describe an intensified phase of globalization, signifying an unprecedented level of interconnectedness and interdependence among nations, economies, and societies on a global scale (Held & McGrew, 2003), its excesses are the root of disillusion. This phase is marked by accelerated flows of capital, goods, services, information, and people across borders, driven by technological advancements and economic liberalization (Stiglitz, 2006). It reflects a qualitative shift in global interactions, eroding traditional barriers to trade and investment (Held & McGrew, 2003). Hyper-globalization is propelled by neoliberal economic policies emphasizing deregulation, privatization, and market liberalization, which reshape the global economy profoundly (Stiglitz, 2006). Scholars like Ōmae and Ohmae (1995) argue that hyperglobalization leads to the emergence of a borderless world where nation-states cede power to transnational actors such as multinational corporations and supranational organizations. Even amidst discussions regarding the full reach of hyperglobalization, its impact is undeniable, shaping the contemporary global landscape and presenting both opportunities and challenges for societies worldwide (Hirst & Thompson, 1996).

Despite the hype of hyper-globalization, several issues in the last one-and-a-half decades, beginning from the GFC 2008–2009, have bedeviled the burgeoning global sector and impacted many developed countries in various ways. GFC and its aftermath affected production, supply chain, and overall trade. As a result, the GDP shares dropped to 52% from around 61% (The World Bank, 2021). This catapulted the world economy into a state of flux, with rampant unemployment. Although economic growth appears to have returned to normal in recent years, it has resulted in multiple crises in America and Western Europe, most notably the “Euro-crisis” (Bremer et al., 2020). Even in the aftermath of the GFC, the liberal economy, characterized by the open global market, experienced internal bleeding. China's accession into the WTO, along with the presence of other emerging industrial countries in the global economy, had a detrimental effect on the manufacturing sector in the 2000s; lower wages in developing countries affected highly paid workers in industrialized countries. As a result, workers in top industrial countries either lost their employment, or were forced to accept lower compensation. Autor and others (2013) coined the term “China

¹This term coined by Fernand Braudel (1973) is widely used in macro-historical research to trace the period from 1453 to about 1640 (Zinkina et al., 2019).



trade shock” or “China shock” to capture the impact on the manufacturing sector's import and export ratios. Furthermore, between 2000 and 2019, the manufacturing sector in the United States lost up to 86% of its jobs (Autor et al., 2021).

Along with the economic repercussions, the sociocultural impact is not to be underestimated; globalization pitted liberal views against local traditions and culture, while multiculturalism opposed traditionalism (Bornschieer, 2010; Down, 2007; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Kinnvall, 2004; Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017; Walter, 2010). This cultural shock was felt not only in the Western countries, but also in the Global South. Russian President Vladimir Putin's assessment is pertinent here. “The liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population,” he remarked (Financial Times, 2019). He singled out the LGBT cause and warned that “...this must not be allowed to overshadow the culture, traditions and traditional family values of millions of people making up the core population” (Financial Times, 2019). In this regard, one of the most critical variables is the refugee crisis, which has had a lasting impact on European society and culture. In many countries, anti-immigration movements protested against refugees as well as regular migration, particularly from Asia and Africa. Furthermore, in recent years, anti-Muslim protests or Islamophobia have become commonplace in Europeans' everyday life. As Rodrik (2018) aptly puts it, right-wing populists in Europe portray Muslim immigration, minority groups (gypsies or Jews), and Brussels bureaucrats as the “other.” According to Kriesi and others (2008, 2012), this fear is the root of nationalist perceptions that globalization has been a failure. However, the term “nativist” was coined to describe a xenophobic kind of nationalism (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022; Mudde, 2007). These simmering tensions have fostered populist and nationalist movements, largely seen as an anti-globalization phenomenon (Mughan et al., 2003; Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017; Swank & Betz, 2023; Zaslove, 2008).

Milner (2021) has investigated the rise of populist party voter percentage in 15 West European countries over the last 50 years. He observed that right populist parties won on average 5% in the early 1970s and 5.5% in 1990; this figure doubled to 10% in 2008, and eventually grew to 17% after 2018. The rise of populist parties across Europe has been attributed to the effects of globalization (Kriesi, 2010, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2006). Euroskepticism and anti-immigrant sentiment, on the other hand, are among the most strongly linked elements to voting for right-wing populist parties in Europe (Billiet & De Witte, 1995; Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2015; Dunn, 2015; Ford et al., 2012; Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Kinnvall, 2004; Milner, 2021; Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017; Van der Brug et al., 2000). Populism, Steenbergen and Siczek (2017) contend, is a high-risk bet.

Brexit is the most well-known example of contemporary populism. There is no denying that populist ideas, concerns, and movements played a decisive role in the Brexit process (Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017). The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the party behind Brexit, grew strongly in the European Parliament election in 2014 and the UK parliament election in 2015, claiming “success” for the Brexit issue as a populist measure (Ford et al., 2012; Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017). Becker and others (2017') noted that, in addition to demographic characteristics and industry mix, both austerity and immigration influenced the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom. In other words, globalization had a direct role in Brexit (Colantone & Stanig, 2016; Rodrik, 2018). President Donald Trump's election campaigns in 2016 exhibited an incensed hostility toward globalization, global trade, and the global market. As he lamented to his loyal supporters, “Our politicians have aggressively pursued a policy of globalization—moving our jobs, our wealth, and our factories to Mexico and overseas. Globalization has made the financial elite who donate to politicians very wealthy. But it has left millions of our workers with nothing but poverty and heartache” (Frieden, 2021, p. 305).

Throughout his presidency, Trump advocated for trade protectionism and imposed tariffs on China, Mexico, Canada, the EU, Turkey, and other potential trading partners. He fiercely



opposed international trade agreements such as NAFTA. Trump's immigration strategy elevated the border issue to a worldwide concern in the twenty-first century. Between 2017 and 2020, legal immigration to the United States was slashed in half (49%), with most categories being barred (Anderson, 2020a, 2020b). Another noteworthy endeavor is Trump's famed wall across the U.S.–Mexico border. We also note Trump's crusade against globalization in his decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement, a platform where world leaders have raised their voices on climate change in the last decades. Kriesi and others (2006, p. 922) opined that “losers of the globalization process to seek to protect themselves through protectionist measures and through an emphasis on the maintenance of national boundaries and independence” (as mentioned by Milner, 2021, p. 2289).

In fact, the concept of liberal democracy gained ground as a result of globalization. Today, both external and internal threats pose a danger to liberal democracy. According to Fukuyama (2020), Diamond (2020), and many other researchers, internal challenges play a bigger role in the decline of liberal democracy. One pivotal concern is increased inequality with and across countries. Although inequality is not a new issue in human history, it became more pervasive and widespread under the conditions of neoliberal globalization. While concurring on the role played by inequality and the informalization of labor, Huntington (1991, pp. 15–16) crisply remarked: “If people around the world come to see the United States as a fading power beset by political stagnation, economic inefficiency, and social chaos, its perceived failures will inevitably be seen as the failures of democracy, and the worldwide appeal of democracy will diminish.”

Ironically, the West, particularly the United States, frequently assists autocrats in the Middle East and Africa for regional geopolitics. For example, it did not support the new democratic governments that emerged following the Arab Spring, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia. Instead, it welcomed autocrats such as General Sisi and, more recently, Tunisian President Kais Saied who deposed the democratic government. This could be due to Islamophobia, such as the rise of Islamic fundamentalism claimed by Huntington (1991) and Fukuyama (1989, 2020). However, contemporary Muslim intellectuals such as Rachid Ghannouchi, Hassan Turabi, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi have campaigned for years to promote the idea that democracy is compatible with Islamic political norms and ideals (Islam & Islam, 2017; Rahman, 2020, 2021; Tamimi, 2001; Turabi, 1983). Furthermore, today's Islamists uphold democracy as the best form of government. Thus, both Huntington (1991) Fukuyama (1989, 2020) might have to revise their bigoted views about Islam and Muslims as opponents of democracy. It is worth asking: Why didn't the West promote democracy in the Middle East? Is it a challenge from within? Lest we forget, the U.S.–led western invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq as well as continued support for Israeli genocide on Palestinians have had a detrimental impact on the legitimacy and efficacy of globalization. Among other implications, it devalued the U.S. economy, tarnished its military, and unleashed a refugee crisis across Europe and Asia. On the other hand, the U.S.–Taliban deal after 20 years of war indicated the decline of Western hegemony since China is now collaborating with the Taliban. This deal is a crucial step toward legitimizing illiberal power in the existing world order.

The ecological climacteric—a result of liberalization and development that include exploitation of Southern resources, massive population displacements, and elimination of staple foods for subsistence dwellers who make up most of the world—casts doubt on the legitimacy of neoliberal globalization (McMichael, 2017). Two questions are in order: Does this liberal capitalist development lead to human development? And is it sustainable? The depletion of our physical environment is directly connected to globalization: a million acres of agricultural land disappear annually to urban-industrial development; two million acres of farmland are lost annually to erosion, soil salinization, and flooding or soil saturation by intensive agriculture, which consumes groundwater 160% faster than it can be replenished; 80 countries are experiencing severe water shortages, with more than one billion people lacking clean water; and by 2025, two-thirds of the



world population will face water stress (Islam, 2015; McMichael, 2017). One of the long-term impacts of neoliberal globalization is the rupture of humanity's long-term relationship with nature and society, which pose an existential threat to our planet (Islam & Hossain, 2016). A series of counter-globalization movements are currently contesting neoliberal globalization from simple discontent to sporadic resistance to mass political mobilizations across the world. A global social forum, for instance, adamantly proclaimed that “another world is possible” (McMichael, 2017).

THE TRANSITIONAL ERA AND A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

Globalization has been through transitional periods in history, during which forecasters predicted its demise. But false prophets there always were and there will always be: globalization, despite all bad-mouthing, is still alive and well. However, boosted by COVID-19, the GFC has given rise to a new transitional era. Illustratively, during the pandemic, along with reinforced regionalization and re-localization of entire sections of value chains (Enderwick & Buckley, 2020), our daily lives were dramatically altered; we are now more keen to purchase our daily essentials from online markets. Netflix and Amazon have thrived, and we communicate more often via Zoom, Facetime, or Google Meet.

However, as technology advances, social networks are expanding into the Metaverse. In this regard, some researchers contend that we have moved into a post-globalized era. Although the topic of post-globalization is not new, it is worth revisiting. More than a decade ago, Gardels (2008) claimed that the post-globalization age had begun, particularly after the GFC of 2008–2009. It was variously defined as the “era after globalization” or “completed globalization”; essentially, it entailed a globalized worldview as well as respect for history and local specificity (Bagrova & Kruchinin, 2020; Nordtveit, 2010).

While globalization does not appear to be declining, the liberal notion of Western hegemony certainly is—perhaps not in the near future, but likely in the medium or long run. In this case, should we see China as a feasible alternative? Or perhaps as a bipolar power along with the United States? Without a doubt, the Middle Kingdom is a serious contender for the new global order. China is the second largest economy in the world, after the United States. It previously ranked as the leading exporter and the second largest importer (WTO, 2021). Several researchers and practitioners put China as a global superpower or on the verge of becoming one (Cao & Paltiel, 2016; Fish, 2017; Maher, 2016; Tunsjø, 2018; Xuotong, 2019; Zeng & Breslin, 2016). The embrace of China and the Chinese language is a good testimony. For instance, on the website of the University of Oxford, one of the world's leading universities, Chinese is the only other language option available alongside English. Admittedly, the portal² aimed at providing primary information and useful links to Chinese visitors. Nonetheless, we are accustomed to seeing English as the unipolar foreign language default option on official websites of universities based in non-English speaking countries. This new trend is just a little representation of how China is slowly but surely becoming more relevant in the global arena, if not a force to reckon with.

Perhaps it might be a bit too hasty to categorize China as a global superpower. For a variety of reasons, China's economic progress has been critiqued, one of which is from the humanistic perspective. China will most likely impose control over the economy to some extent, but not over the social or political sectors. Western liberalism comes in a package that includes powerful political and cultural ideologies; China does not have any of those. Along with China, the Eastern world or its rising powers lacks marketable powerful ideologies to influence others. Several researchers argue that a China hegemony is not possible in the short or mid-term due to its numerous deficiencies in various sectors (Bremmer, 2020; Öniş, 2017). Notwithstanding, if that were to happen, it would be in the very long term, even it looks impossible today. As an

²See <http://www.ox.ac.uk/cn>.



illustration, the United States wasn't visible on the map of the world until 250 years ago. So, why not China, Russia (again), Turkey, or anyone else as a superpower?

Given the current scenario where the United States has weakened, the EU faces crucial challenges due to populism and extreme nationalism, and China is considered unfit, a truly multipolar world is indeed preferable. Emerging or rising power countries—such as Russia, India, Brazil, South Africa, and, of course, China, collectively referred to as BRICS—may play a key role in the new era. Their influence is growing on a local as well as global scale. In this regard, Indian Prime Minister Modi's Davos speech demonstrates his unwavering commitment to a multipolar world. As he intoned in front of world leaders, “today we believe in a multicultural world and a multipolar world order” (Forbes, 2018). During the most recent summit in 2023, the BRICS extended invitations to six new members, namely Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Reuters, 2023). Notably, over 40 countries had indicated their interest in joining BRICS, and among them, 23 formally submitted applications for membership (Al Jazeera, 2023). This expansion is crucial within the context of a multipolar world, specifically in the efforts to balance power dynamics in the Middle East between the United States and China. As an illustrative example, China has played a crucial role in fostering the re-establishment of relations between two regional rivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia maintained robust ties with the United States for a long time; however, recent events in the Middle East have strained these connections. China's involvement has become particularly influential in navigating and mediating diplomatic engagements between Saudi Arabia and Iran during a period marked by shifting dynamics in the region.

Turkey, along with the BRICS, is a player not to be underestimated in this discussion. Turkey has been beefing up its international and regional image to reflect an emerging power. For instance, the Organization of Turkic States changed its name from the Turkic Council/the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States in 2021, which is an indication of its local strength. President Erdogan's book *A Fairer World Is Possible* and his UN General Assembly speech “The World Is Bigger Than Five” both demonstrate his predilection for a multipolar world. As he declared, “The world is no longer in World War I conditions nor in the conditions of World War II. So let's give a signal to humanity. If we can be in solidarity with all 194 countries, if we force these conditions together with all global media and NGOs, then these permanent members have to control themselves once again” (Daily Sabah, 2021). Besides Turkey, other countries such as Indonesia, Mexico, and Argentina also have considerable leverage at the regional level as emerging powers.

COVID-19 AND THE GLOBALIZATION PHENOMENON

The COVID-19 pandemic touched every aspect of human life throughout the world. According to the WHO's official report, more than 6.8 million people died in the pandemic over the last three years, while the actual number is thought to be higher (WHO, 2023). COVID-19 has impacted manufacturing, the supply chain, and communication, resulting in a drop in the global trade index. Numerous crises have hit the health-care system, and health diplomacy has emerged as the most decisive component of foreign policy. Several countries, including the developed ones, struggled to obtain sufficient medical equipment to treat their patients. For a set period, borders were sealed. Global commerce fell to 51.56%, roughly the same as during the GFC years (The World Bank, 2021). Although the global trade and economy have started to recover following massive vaccination and other draconian steps taken against COVID-19, economic recession is already rearing its ugly head.

Researchers and practitioners are largely divided when predicting the world order in the post-COVID era. Some have pointed out that global politics will be largely unaffected in the post-COVID era except for some new developments. Conversely, others have sounded the



death knell for liberal globalization and American hegemony with the growing power and influence of China. Nye Jr. (2020) maintained that the idea of COVID-19 paving the way to the “new world order” is overstated. This is corroborated by Pearson (2020) who marshaled DHL global connection statistics from 2001 to 2020 to show that the global connection index was above that of the 2008–2009 global financial crises. He advanced that the development of digital platforms and technology’s advancement meant that globalization was far from disappearing. Altman and Bastian (2021) put the same point from the global trade index, which is above that of the global financial crises. Kaplan (2020) argued for “globalization 2.0” while Fontaine (2020) made a case for a “new, different and more limited globalization” which would be expedited after COVID-19. Finally, these practitioners think that globalization is not coming to an end but will be reshaping and, in some contexts, slowing down for a certain period of time. In this regard, “slowbalization,” as the Economist (2019) puts it, might be an appropriate term to describe the change.

O’Sullivan (2021), on the other hand, viewed COVID-19 as the “resilience test” of the world order and argued for the end of globalization. Enderwick and Buckley (2020) argued in favor of regionalization, that is, regional economy, which may offer sustained growth in terms of hyper-growth of the existing global system. Wang and Sun (2021) analyzed the U.S.–China trade relation in the last decades and concluded that localization and regionalization have been filling the vacuum of economic globalization in retreat. However, Zhao (2021) highlighted China’s ambition to construct a new world order in place of the existing U.S.-led world order and liberal globalization. Mengzi (2020) underscored the continuity of globalization but this time under Chinese dominance. However, there is no denying that we’re living in unsettling times; as Ciravegna and Michailova (2022) predict, an uncertain period will emerge post-COVID-19. Bremmer (2020) maintains that the COVID-19 pandemic is the first truly global crisis after the GFC of 2008; indeed, it is the first crisis in the “GZero” leaderless era of World politics. Duran (2020) thinks of this period as a global dis(order). According to French President Emmanuel Macron, COVID-19 would change the nature of globalization, with which we have lived for the past 40 years, adding that it was clear that this kind of globalization was reaching the end of its cycle (Irwin, 2020).

Indeed, the performance of the United States during the COVID-19 period is a dismal reflection of its image as a superpower. The United States was itself embroiled in various health crises domestically. Concomitantly, at the international level, the lack of cooperation among Western allies to supply necessary medical equipment coupled with “my country first” populism dampened multilateral coordination and resource sharing to fight the coronavirus. These shortcomings indicate rising geopolitical conflict (Bremmer, 2020). As the world reeled from the coronavirus crisis, China indirectly provided the master plan for fighting the virus and rescuing people within the shortest possible time. From health diplomacy to vaccine diplomacy, China ostensibly exuded more confidence than any other country, a point not missed by Bremmer (2020, p. 15): “The coronavirus crisis shows China much more confident and seeing opportunity in changing the global order toward their benefit on the back of it.”

THINK LOCALLY! STATE, TRADITION, AND GLOBALIZATION

The future does not belong to the globalists. The future belongs to patriots... If you want freedom, take pride in your country. If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty. And if you want peace, love your nation. Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first.

(The Guardian, 2019)



These unusually wise words uttered by President Trump hint at how the world will appear in the future. Fukuyama (2018, 2020) referred to it as “identity” based politics, one in which everyone would be judged according to their origins and yearning for dignity. As he explains,

The psychological basis of identity politics lies in the feelings of humans that they possess an inner worth or dignity which the society around them is failing to recognize.... Identity is intimately linked to emotions of pride, anger, and resentment based on the kind of recognition that one receives (or does not receive).

(Fukuyama, 2020)

Fukuyama's stance holds paramount significance in our research due to his reevaluation following his prior thesis, “The End of History.” In his assessment titled “30 Years of World Politics: What Has Changed” (Fukuyama, 2020), he acknowledges the inadequacy of his earlier predictions concerning the dominance of liberal democracy in the face of challenges posed by nationalism, conservatism, and authoritarian populism.

An identity-based politics would promote tradition as “local values” or “national values,” a significant departure from liberal values. Park (2013) raised the disturbing rhetorical question, “Koreans are white?” and described Korean identity as distinct from the West in a post-globalization context. Nationalism is vital here; as Duran (2020) observed, international politics has become “re-nationalized,” with the state playing a larger role. In this respect, along with Trump's “Make America Great Again” initiative or the Brexit of the United Kingdom, we find other nations flirting with identity-based politics via religion: India with Hinduism, Myanmar with Buddhism, and Muslim majority countries with Islamism. It looks as if Russia's Putin has been mentoring populist conservatism all over the democratic world. Fukuyama (2020) catalogued the Russian leader's ideological development as he blissfully bludgeoned Western liberal notions. Furthermore, Putin often invests Orthodox Christianity with a global mandate against liberal ideologies. Indeed, multi-dimensional conservatism is à la mode. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's extensive media coverage when praying at temples is another relevant example, with his political party making major inroads throughout the country since the last election (Times of India, 2021; Varshney, 2019). The reopening of Turkey's Hagia Sophia as a mosque is also reminiscent of this trend. In his new economic policy, Turkish President Erdogan often mentions the moral imperative to follow the “nass”—explicit commands from the Quran and the Prophetic tradition (DW, 2021).

Besides tradition and identity-based politics in the transitional era of globalization, Konrad (2021) added the re-emerging of the border while Lindberg (2020) called for the return of the state. It is believed that a new, nonliberal perspective of the state with a top-down approach will create a more just economy guided by strong social values. The new state may appear with the border, along with its inescapable *Us-Them* dimension. The future may look like an age of trying to fix “others”—that is, those residing outside one's border. The U.S.–Mexico border or the U.S.–Canada border is a contemporary example of this scenario.

Binary politics and discursive realities often encourage people and nations to become “self-sufficient” with the seductive mantra to “think locally.” However, “mutual dependence” may lead the way for regional or international preventable cooperation (Duran, 2020). As a result, authoritarian or hybrid regimes may become a reality. The United States tolerated or to some extent agreed with the Taliban, and it also allowed the continuity of Syria's Bashar al-Asad's government, which is a clear sign of conferring legitimacy to the authority of illiberal governments. As in the COVID-19 responses, the benefits of top-down, quick-to-respond and strong central governance are quite apparent. In the near future, this will push the global power balance more toward authoritarian governments, while giving authoritarian-oriented leaders of democracies various forms of opportunities to acquire political legitimacy in global politics. Legitimacy is the key element that perpetuates any form of government. In the past,



authoritarian regimes did not get legitimacy from the wider world in the aftermath of the cold war which created fertile conditions for democracy to thrive (Huntington, 1993); today, these regimes are able to garner enough support from the global community.

These global realities embedded in local values may nurture and promote an illiberal era. In his speech, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban predicted “a new state built on illiberal and national foundations” (Frieden, 2021, p. 6). In 2018, China's parliament approved the abolition of the two-term presidential restriction, effectively permitting Xi Jinping to rule for the rest of his life (BBC, 2018). Although democracy is not a matter of concern in the Chinese presidential election, China was governed by a politburo just a few years ago. It won't be surprising if other emerging countries follow in the same footsteps in the future.

Meanwhile, advanced technology has become an instrument to centralize power. As Fukuyama (2020) argued, although artificial intelligence and machine learning can be built into personal devices—and indeed rely on the large amounts of data collected by such devices—individuals will not grasp these technologies as readily as they mastered them on a personal computer. By requiring technologies to share the personal information of their customers, governments acquire vast amounts of data that could be potentially misused to repress freedom and liberty. Today, China often bans social media platforms; the United States took a similar initiative when President Trump instituted a targeted ban on TikTok (DW, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The Global Financial Crisis of 2008–2009 triggered a transitional era of globalization. Buoyed by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising populist and nationalist movements throughout the West, along with ubiquitous anti-globalization voices, precipitated a backlash against globalization at the social, political, and economic levels. In predicting the future of globalization, the academia is largely polarized; while some researchers maintain that globalization will continue albeit in a different shape, others believe that the existing global order will give way to a new order which some contend will be led by China.

This study argued for a transitional period of globalization for a short term (5–10 years) or mid term (10–20 years), which is our definition of the “transitional era” in this study. During this period, a multipolar world will most likely prevail. Beside the United States, growing powers such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and other emerging countries are increasingly shaping world affairs. Identity-based politics, which has already taken strong root in several countries, is a crucial element in the transitional era. The state is re-emerging with border, increasing the specter of an *Us-Them* dichotomy in global politics. This development indicates the (re)iteration of an illiberal world with authoritarian regimes, leaving global politics mired in uncertainty.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

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