

## Globalization and the Democratic Turn in Iran

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### Abstract

Globalization and democracy have become the most debated issues throughout the world, which, no doubt also influence Iran. This paper highlights these phenomena with respect to Iran but takes up the issue through various description and features presented by the contemporary socio- political thinkers and economists. Considering globalization, although the subject matter is very recent but Iran has been experiencing this phenomenon with the emergence of modern communication networks and economic growth. The democratic process had started early in 19th century but was thoroughly suppressed by the despotic regime. However, the globalization trends in 1990s have affected most of the countries and Iran too has experienced the changing mood of the people. Present study focuses on the various aspects of globalization and its influences over democracy during post- revolutionary period.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Iran, Democracy, Democratization waves,

### Introduction

Despite the conflicting opinions of thinkers about globalization, the effect of this phenomenon on human life is beyond question. The effect of globalization on democracy, which political thinkers have focused on, is one of the important aspects of society. Various questions have been raised with respect to the relationship between democracy and globalization:

- Does globalization promote and intensify democracy or will it challenge its development?
  - Is the relation between democracy and globalization necessarily a null and void issue?
  - How globalization affects democracy in Iran?
- Regarding various aspects of globalization, this study highlights a developing phenomenon influencing overall human life and thought that can be interpreted as a new paradigm in political

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thought and sociology.<sup>1</sup>For the gradual development of the world democracy, we apply "democracy wave"<sup>2</sup> thesis in different period. Concerning common meaning of globalization, which appears in various waves, we consider the new wave of globalization in the later half of 20th century as one of the effects on Iranian democracy.

### **The Origins of Globalization**

The word *Globalization* has been prevalent since 1960 that was included first time by Webster in 1961 as "globalism" and "globalization".<sup>3</sup> During 1970s they were used in the scientific literature and gradually got their way into other areas. Now these terms are the main issues of human sciences. *Jahani shodan*, *Jahani sazi*<sup>4</sup>, *Jahan gostari*<sup>5</sup>, "*Jahani budan*"<sup>6</sup>, are some of the equivalents of globalization in Persian, each persisting on the existence and non-existence of exterior factors and conceptual views.

The multi-dimensional features of globalization encourage thinkers to view it differently. Some define globalization as "merging all economic aspects in world wide phases"<sup>7</sup> or "creating new global market and new political organizations"<sup>8</sup>, while some like McGrew emphasizing political dimension suggests that globalization means "constructing various mutual relations between governments and societies which lead to global system".<sup>9</sup> Others, having ideological insights, call it "westernizing phenomena of the world"<sup>10</sup>, "new form of colonialism and the last stage of imperialism"<sup>11</sup>, "dominance of liberal-democracy in the world"<sup>12</sup> or "a kind of Americanization."<sup>13</sup> To achieve right and common definition of

globalization, it seems, will lead us to view it as a new paradigm in political thinking and interpretations like the one that focuses on the pressure of time and place, which was used by David Harvey<sup>14</sup>, Anthony Giddens<sup>15</sup>, Ronald Robertson<sup>16</sup>, Martin Albrow<sup>17</sup>, Malcolm Waters<sup>18</sup>. They perceive globalization as a new and widespread paradigm in various fields of human sciences. Thus we can define globalization as a procedure of pressure of time and place which imposes on human beings, because of their mutual needs, to consciously become one unique global society and consequently brings along more political and geographical limitations in relation to cultural and social orders of societies.

Revolution in information technology and communications, economic growth and global markets, national and trans-national issues have promoted time and place pressures and created a kind of closeness among human beings, in one or the other way. Therefore, this new maturity of globalization dates back only to 1990s, because the events like the end of Cold War, disintegration of Communism, emergence of internet and satellite channels<sup>19</sup>, and growth of market renovated globalization.

### **Aspects, Dimensions and Features of Globalization**

Globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon that has economic, technical, political, cultural and social aspects:

1- Technological aspect of globalization like communication and transport industries and human sciences like microelectronics, robots and

computers (hardware or software) 20are the principal dimensions, and main source of globalization.

2- Economic aspect of globalization like industrial development, regional and global economic convergences, rapid growth of business, the spread of communications and transportation, consumerism, exploitation of mines, mutual needs of the countries in various fields, priorities of countries for decreasing prices, and international cooperation with the increasing role of international organizations such as WTO, IMF and the World Bank, formation of currencies like Dollar, Euro, Yen are some of the major aspects provide wider dimension for formulating policies and plan.<sup>21</sup> Following are some of its features:

- Globalization of trade has changed the world into a global market increasing GDP growth from 1% in 1820 to 13.5% in 1992.<sup>22</sup>
- The increasing foreign investments, international financial markets and stock exchange.
- Division of labor help to transfer the industrial products of developed to developing countries.
- Establishment of liberal market economy with free competition according to Harvey boost the flow of money, shares, goods with easy financial exchange and rapid movement across the globe.
- Expansion of multinational companies and their supremacy over regional economies, doing more than 1/3 products, 80 percent investments and 2/3 of trade globally.<sup>23</sup>
- Massive migration of labor has wide scale social and cultural effects.

3- Political aspect of globalization has the following features:

• Despite the belief of the disappearance of nation-states <sup>24</sup>, it continues to play vital role in the globalization. Globalization change state's position delivering powers to institutions and super national organizations.<sup>25</sup>

• Emergence of neo political actors on national and super-national scene that includes ethnic & regional groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

• Common view on the issues like ecosystem, terrorism and diseases to find global solution.

• Human right and its application to the vital and common issues influence various nations.<sup>26</sup>

• Formation of political culture based on human values such as peace, freedom, and equality.

4 - Cultural aspect of globalization leads the formation of global culture based on common human values is imminent aspects of globalization<sup>27</sup> create global identification:

- Development of qualitative & quantitative communication.
- Consumerism, advertising, development of financial and commercial circles.
- Recruiting ethnic groups like Balkan, and Asian Kurds help to culture variety.<sup>28</sup>

5- Social aspects of globalization refers to the following points:

- Formation of social, neoclassic movements with globalization of values like movements for women, peace, ecology, labor and youth etc.
- Spread of social movements and peoples' migration due to their access to communication
- Political, social and cultural organizations grown from 224 in 1909 to 4917 in 1991.<sup>29</sup>

### **Democratization Waves**

If we consider democracy as one of the governing principle of political system<sup>30</sup> and focus on gradual and relative trend of transformation to democratic system, we encounter with democratization trend.<sup>31</sup> Recently, globalization has been influenced by new waves and one of the theses in this regard has been presented by Samuel Huntington with three democratization waves:

First wave: since 1828 to World War I (1926), influencing the USA and European countries.

Second wave: from World War II to 1962, in the countries conquered by Allies or liberated colonies.

Third wave: since 1974 until now <sup>32</sup>.

Huntington in his applied model with definite indicators had compared democracies in different countries and clarified the hierarchy of these events and their relation with each other and its transfer to other countries.

Different definitions and ideas based on the experiences have formed various models of democracy such as direct and parliament democracy, Marxism, neo-Marxism, elite system, applied system, applied, pluralistic, neo right, minimum government, and participative democracy.<sup>33</sup> In addition Elvin Toffler's "semi-direct democracy model", <sup>34</sup> Held's direct autonomy"<sup>35</sup> and "digital democracy"<sup>36</sup> are other models with globalization's characteristics.

Various models of democracy and new issues have insisted on understanding democratization of political system, political participation, and possibility of social movement. It seems for the progress of democracy in each political system thinkers have highlighted different indicators to

show the degree of democratization of one political system:

- 1- Intellectuality of political groups and their efforts to benefit the masses.
- 2- Free and fair elections with right to vote, freedom of parties and groups.
- 3- Role of people in enacting, regulating and executing decision without any pressure.
- 4- Political liberty such as freedom of speech, media, publications ,associations.
- 5- Safeguarding and securing personal freedoms of member and respecting their civil rights.
- 6- Equal social and professional opportunities for citizens for political and social movements.
- 7- Mechanism for solving conflicts and observing human right.

Many different local and global factors have had influence on the unity and development of democracy indicators. It seems that globalization in the case of its unique and substantial characteristics have imminent and great effects on democracy indicators.

### **Relative Views on Globalization and Democracy**

There are three insights about the influence of globalization on democracy:

- 1- Some believe globalization is an element for spread and intensification of democracy in political structures. Samuel Huntington believes in contagion of democracy to other countries<sup>37</sup>, Robert Nozick, Fon Hayek, and Milton Friedman defend minimum state, which is formed under the influence of global procedures, while the follower of World System Theory try to understand political issues in global military framework and persist on

democratic passage in global wave frame<sup>38</sup>. Fukuyama considers globalization as the movement of national societies toward liberal democracy<sup>39</sup> and David Held suggests the thesis of universality as a pattern for ruling stat.<sup>40</sup>

2- In contrary, some authors believe globalization as a challenge against democracy. McGrew suggests globalization has made some problems for democracy.<sup>41</sup> Rob Walker and Murray Low with regard to decline of nation-states doubted about continuation of democracy<sup>42</sup> and Farid Zakaria talks about narrow-minded democracy in recent age.<sup>43</sup>

3- Some authors with semi opinion are unable to judge because existing conditions have simply distinguished negative and positive effects of globalization over democracy.

We find the third view more acceptable because it is unable to give definite judgment and it considers the differences between the conditions of countries in democratization phenomenon. Here Laclau and Mouffe have denied the definite proof and Habermas believes that sophistication of societies block democracy. Thus these three have tried to prove decentralization of government could not fade away the democracy, and this phenomenon is applicable under some terms.<sup>44</sup>

### **Influencing Ways of Globalization Over Democracy**

Globalization has multi ferrous effects on democratic movements:

1- Globalization substantially has changed the definition of democracy and democratic system. These days, new features have been added to the

definition of democracy focusing on civil institutions.

2- Globalization has increased the awareness of nations and insists people to intervene in their own political destiny through communication networks. Modern communication network have influenced the environment making cyber-space to exchange information and awareness between societies and people<sup>45</sup>, and increase participations of non-elite in politics, and has known as an indicator for democracy in recent days.<sup>46</sup>

3- In addition, the print medium such as book, newspaper, is also effective in free development of information and reducing government's controls. However western media with regard to production and distribution of information have been criticized by a host of experts.<sup>47</sup> Some experts also assumed its developments as an intensifier for democracy.<sup>48</sup> Thus it seems that effectiveness of mass media is vital for the spread of democracy.

4- Important base of globalization is development of market economy. Increasing global business, transfer of capital goods and services open the doors of national economic development and increasing common wealth.<sup>49</sup> The experiences by Southeast Asian countries show that economy development gradually erases the authority, bureaucracy, and dictatorship and intensify democratization trends.<sup>50</sup> Other aspect of the effects of global markets over democracy has been found in relation between economic liberalism and democracy. Some thinkers believe that liberalism itself promotes democracy in the world<sup>51</sup>, though many have challenged this view.

5- Emergence of new social movements is another

way of globalization to influence democracy. The movements like women, student, youth, and peace, anti-racism, ethnic and civil rights bring the bureaucratic and authoritarian regime to standstill. On the other hand, super national social movement, are considered as helping tool to civil society.<sup>52</sup>

6- The cultural convergence had been influenced by mass media and western culture lead to globalize democratic values like human rights, civil society, political freedom, political cooperation and intensification of democratic movements.<sup>53</sup>

7- Globalization has great help to develop non-governmental organizations in super-national and global levels. These organizations usually has no specific relation to political system, has been formed around different issues such as human values and democratic principles and has effective role in creating democratic movements and intensifying democracy in political structures of countries.

Today, international organizations easily act with the member countries and take up the cases ignoring the powers of rogue states. Cases such as Pinochet arrest (late Chile dictator), establishing Yugoslavian war criminal, and USA intervention in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan with the excuses of terrorism, human rights violation and WMD are samples of the role of these institutions in enforcing democratic principles to these countries.

### **Democratization Waves in Iran**

To comprehend the effect of globalization over political culture and structures of Iran, it is necessary to know democratic history in Iran. In

this regard while applying Huntington's thesis of democracy waves and its historical sequence with political system, we can refer to the following three basic democratic movements in contemporary era:

First, constitutional revolution, which according to Huntington's theses is reflection of first wave of democracy in the West.<sup>54</sup> Freedom movements and democratic changes in European countries like Russia, France, England, Italy, and Asian countries like Ottoman Turkey, Egypt, India, Japan and China have major impact on the freedom movements resulting Iranian parliamentary system in 1906.

Second, the ends of authoritarian regime of Reza Shah in August 1941 till the beginning of nationalization of oil movement. It was contemporary to the Huntington's thesis in second wave (1943-62), has formed after World War II. In this era with presences of some parties and political organizations, a movement has formed with democratic and nationalism goals gradually led to nationalization of oil movement.

Third, Islamic revolution of Iran in 1978 and subsequent changes. Local and global elements had influenced Islamic revolution that collapsed the royal system substituting with Islamic republic system<sup>55</sup>. This wave is coincidental with Huntington's third wave theses, which was started with the end of dictatorship since 1974 in Portugal. This public movement had been shaped since the early 1970s when dictatorship was on its climax.

The events following May 1997 election should be considered as uprising and rereading of thoughts of revolution in Iran and practice of some

procrastinated principles. All local and global changes during 1989 and 1997 led to the formation of new democratic movement are manifested in elections. Moreover, it seems, local and global changes because of extinguishing values and democratic structures have more eminent influence on the formation of this movement.

### **Democratic Process in Post- Islamic Revolution**

If we divide post- Islamic revolution era into four stages, we relatively find different conditions in political culture, administrative structure and democratic process:

First Stage: From the victory of Islamic Revolution to August 1981 provided space for free activities by parties, groups and publications, bringing some kind of non- institutional democracy.

Second stage: From August 1981 to the death of Imam Khomeini in 1989. Due to the specific political condition owing to the 8 years imposed war by Iraq, political tendencies, and charismatic personality of Imam and because of legal legitimacy<sup>56</sup>, this is known as ideological stage which had democratic elements with some governmental authorization.<sup>57</sup>

Third stage: The year between the death of Imam Khomeini and June 1987 is the period of economic reconstruction and social development and detente policies. Government widened the space for reviewing groups' activities, parties and press publications.<sup>58</sup> All these changes in this period had been influenced by globalization phenomenon and spread of communication and media and foreign pressures.

Fourth period: The years after 1997 until now. The

creation of political space after May1997's election had speeded up social movement, space for association of parties and groups, spread of freedom of publications. Although ideological and charismatic elements were there in legitimizing and democratizing political system, it encountered a lot of hindrances and challenges. We consider this period as a period of "pseudo-democracy". <sup>59</sup>

### **Globalization Era and the Grounds for Democracy in Iran**

In the post-Cold War era we witnessed wide effect of globalization indicators in political system in Iran. Also there were effective grounds for the spread of democracy in Iran:

- 1- Reinforcement of economic middle class, strengthened since second Pahlavi era.
- 2- Formation of organizations, and parties with democratic mottos and purposes.<sup>60</sup>
- 3- Emerging social gaps and transforming status of women due to increase in education and work effected their political participation. The number of educated women increased from 41.1 percent in 1986 to 45.9 percent in 1996.<sup>61</sup> The number of girls who pass the entrance exam of higher education has grown from 28.9% in 1991-2 to 42.6% in 1996-7 and the number of employed women has grown from 975 thousand in 1986 to 1 million and 765 thousand in 1996.<sup>62</sup>
- 4- Increasing population, urbanization (47% in 1976 to 61.3% in 1996) because of wide facilities for communication and education, encourage the people toward democratic culture.<sup>63</sup>
- 5- Economic gap in the society has caused dissatisfaction and encourages them to cooperate

with rich to get political powers.

6- Educational gap means increasing the rate of education and literacy in society, so the rate of literacy in Iran has grown from 41.8% in 1980 to 57.1% in 1997 and the number of students grew from 154000 in 1986 to 1, 250,000 in 1994.<sup>64</sup>

7- The development of religious democracy helped to strengthen the democratic movement.

### **The Effects of Globalization Indicators Over Democracy in Iran**

Globalization has influenced the democratization of political system in Iran at two levels. The globalization, at first stage, had influenced the ruling political culture of Iran and at second stage over existing political structures and institutions. With regard to various waves in contemporary history of Iran, every time we witness the existence of foreign as well as internal factors in the development of democratic movements:

1- Increase in population, and urbanization, and literacy in Iran, simultaneously applying new communication technologies has increased the awareness of people about politics, government,

freedom and democracy. Increasing effect of electronic media and have notable effects on public awareness. Published books increased from 3812 in 1986 to 12897 in 1996 and the number of press publications gone from 245 to 485 in 1996. <sup>65</sup>

In order to study the status of each country in new communication arena and its distance with global level has been termed as "digital gap", which has been measured with different indicators and conclusively with ISI indicator<sup>66</sup>, the information society's index, which has been suggested by World Bank and consist of 24 variables in four substructures like computer, internet, communication, and social substructure. Among them, Iran is one of "beginners" has not qualified substructures to exploit in digital era. Human Development Index (HDI) is another indicator and among 173 countries, Iran has got 98 grades, while, the comparison between effective variable over this indicator in Iran has been grown from 1975 until 2000.<sup>67</sup>

Year	1 975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
HDI	556%	563%	607%	645%	688%	721%

Under this indicator, the variables like number of stable and mobile phone per 1000 person has been measured. In 1990 in Iran the number of stable and mobile phone per each person were, 40, which grew to 1490 in 2000. Among the countries, the grade of Iran is 59, Internet grade 56, in international phone calls grade 31, and in tourism

49.<sup>68</sup>

Although the volume of globalization is less, the spread of communication was more sensible and had influenced the political culture of Iran. In first years of study about the indicators of globalization, the focuses were on publications, book and foreign radio, Internet development and growth of server



users. As a whole, we can say that the recent development of communication technologies on people and society and development of mass media are indicators of globalization.

2- Another influencing field of globalization over democracy is the global markets, privatization with new economic policies. The relation with the world economy, industrial developments, and cooperation with international economic institutions have been accorded after Hashemi Rafsanjani took responsibility.<sup>69</sup> With regard to Iranian share in the world economy and existing hindrances in the way of its membership in World Trade Organization<sup>70</sup>, over the effects and delegating economic activities strengthen the indicators of democracy in Iran.

3- Membership of various organizations, associations, and super national and international institutions recently has great influence over democratization such as the membership of United Nations and related organization, Human rights and women support associations, attention to minorities and ethnic groups are some of the samples.<sup>71</sup>

4- The theme of Dialogue of Civilizations is an effect of globalization paradigm over political thought that helps to form a new dialogue for digesting different political challenges with Iran and rely on elements and democratic values like freedom of speech and expression. This issue first proposed by Mohammad Khatami has been considered as a part of common motto in the democratic movement after 1997 election.

5- Civil Council and Presidential elections and making them as an effective institutions in

increasing political cooperation are sample of growth of globalization indicators and the effect of their growth in increasing political participations are considered to be symbol of globalization's effect on growing democracy indicators. The findings of the 7th and 8th Presidential elections and courses of Islamic and Civil councils and voting show the maximum of victory belong to those party whose motto were political and democratic reforms.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

With regard to the above-mentioned issues, the globalization phenomenon in new form has various technical, economic, political, cultural and social aspects, which in itself have wider effects on human life. This phenomenon influenced new paradigm in political thought and acted over reinforcing democratic waves, spreading and strengthening democratic culture and structures. This effect has been facilitated through the spread of communication, mass media like in enlightening public awareness, political cooperation and creating free space for political dialogue and expression. Moreover, developing world trade to develop countries economies, reinforcing civil society have vital influence for the democratization of political structures. Further, creation of neo political culture, efforts for finding common solutions for human issues is other points of globalization effects for democratization.

In Iran the features of globalization such as development of media, endeavor to enter world market, membership of international organizations and détente' policies with other countries have

caused the development of democratic culture and strengthened democratic movement in political structure. Public participation in election, publications, political parties, NGOs, and correction of some legal and civil laws and rules<sup>74</sup> are some examples of gradual reforms in the political system and relative growth of democratization process. In sum, democratization movement is a new phenomenon in Iran and there are more challenges and hindrances, but the effect of globalization phenomenon in reinforcing this trend is irrefutable.

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## جهانی شدن و چرخش دموکراتیک در ایران

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### چکیده

جهانی شدن و دموکراسی از مهمترین مقولات مورد بحث در سطح جهانی است که بی‌گمان بر ایران نیز تأثیر گذار است. مقاله حاضر این پدیده را با نظر به کشور ایران برجسته می‌سازد، موضوع مورد بحث از جنبه‌ها و جوانب نظری گوناگونی که به وسیله اندیشمندان در حوزه سیاسی، اجتماعی و اقتصادی معاصر بررسی شده است نیز دنبال می‌گردد، اگر چه پدیده جهانی شدن موضوعی جدید است اما کشور ایران از زمان پدید آمدن شبکه‌های ارتباطی جدید و رشد اقتصادی همواره آن را تجربه کرده است. همچنان فرایند دموکراتیک نیز پیش از آن در قرن نوزدهم آغاز شده بود اما این روند به طوری کلی به وسیله رژیم استبدادی سرکوب می‌گردید. به هر حال، گرایشهای جهانی در دهه ۱۹۹۰ بسیاری از کشورها را تحت تأثیر خود قرارداد و در این میان، کشور ایران نیز با دگرگونی روحیه مردم مواجه بوده است. مطالعه حاضر با تمرکز بر جنبه‌های گوناگون جهانی شدن به بررسی تأثیرات آن بر دموکراسی در دوره معاصر می‌پردازد.

**کلیدواژگان:** جهانی شدن، ایران، امواج دموکراسی.

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