

PART III

Global Trends

In this textbook, 'global trend' is defined as a manner of thinking or behaving that gains worldwide recognition or imitation. In the following chapters we will discuss seven important global trends that still affect the world today. Some of these trends have a political impact, while others are more important in the academic domain where they provide new outlooks on human behavior. What distinguishes global trends from global structures is that the trends represent recent developments that have not yet consolidated into global structures, that have faded away before ever becoming a global structure, or that have evolved into something else. For instance, some argue that the global trend of secularization that was dominant in the second half of the twentieth century is being replaced by a new trend of increasing religionization, while others argue that religion has always been a global structure and that the secularism of the twentieth century was merely a glitch in history. Another example is the global trend of international cooperation, which appeared to become a global trend in the second half of the twentieth century, but since the 2010s is being challenged by an emerging unilateralism.

Power changes

The exercise of power is an intricate part of human nature and as such may be considered a global structure. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, we can observe two trends related to power: one relates to the international practice of power, the other to the way we think about power.

International practices of power

Since the Second World War, the world has witnessed a decrease in the number of wars between states and an increase of cooperation among states resulting in a proliferation of international organizations. It seemed that a large part of the world had moved from power and prestige to peace and cooperation. To some, this development heralded the emergence of a new global structure (or, as some preferred to call it: a “new world order”). To others, these processes merely represented a temporary phase in the history of humankind pointing out a continuation of power politics by states like America, Russia and China, and the re-emergence of unilateral actions by these states since the 2010s. The latter raises the question whether international cooperation is a global trend that will consolidate into a global structure or is merely a global trend that is fading away. Since we are in the middle of these developments, we cannot conclude on the outcome yet: have we indeed moved from power and prestige to peace and cooperation, or has this development been reversed since the 2010s?

Whatever the case, it is a development that we can call a global trend, regardless of whether it will develop in a global structure or is about to end. To analyze this trend, we will use two frames of reference: power and leadership. Both frames are fueled by the 3-Is (Interests, Ideas, and Identities). When the 3-Is energize people, power is a means to use this energy, and leadership is a means to channel that power. It is then the leader's choice to wield that power alone (unilateralism) or to cooperate with others (multilateralism). These three elements – power, leadership, and uni- or multilateralism – are key to understanding the developments that are taking place in the global trend of international cooperation and will be discussed below.

Power

One way of looking at power is the ability to influence the behavior or thinking of others to arrive at a desired outcome. In short: the ability to make others do what you want them to do. Defined this way, power is present in almost every human

interaction, from raising children to landing jobs to running companies and waging wars.

The next question is how that power is wielded. In the interaction among states, we often distinguish between **'hard' and 'soft' power**, that is between the power to coerce and the power to convince, respectively. These notions also apply to interhuman relations. While for centuries was considered a measure of power that earned respect – think of kings leading their men into battle – seemed to have become the new trend in second half of the twentieth century. The battle-hardened warrior was replaced by the well-spoken orator. Both have the same aim – creating order – but seek to reach it with different means. To many, soft power appeared to be a new global trend.

Language is power...

'Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true'

(Michel Foucault, in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*, 1991)

However, critics have pointed out that the exercise of soft power is subject to other, internal power dynamics. They believe power is not only what people do or say, it is also embedded in who they are. In interactions among people, for instance, structures of patriarchy, religion or racism often still play a role. A woman may be the minister and therefore holding a position of power, but that power can be undercut by people who consider the fact that she is a woman a disadvantage to that position of power. Similar power plays are waged in cases involving people from different color, social background and religion, amongst others. The power imbalances at the foundation of these occurrences also manifest themselves at the level of states: former colonized countries are still very sensitive to a condescending tone or treatment from their former colonizer, just as the colonizer may still have difficulty to kick that habit, possibly out of an enduring belief in its superiority.

Since the 2010s, a new dimension of power has emerged in these power dynamics which can be considered 'manipulation'. This is referred to as **'sharp power'** which taps into the omnipresent information technology that can be manipulated into, and is conducive to the production of fake news and disinformation to influence people. But sharp power is not just another form of soft power; it can also take the shape of hard power when the manipulation of information takes on aggressive forms

by means of hacks, deep fakes, possibly state-driven. Examples may include state-run ‘troll farms’ that target certain information sources with disruptive forms of disinformation, or states investing in foreign information and knowledge sectors like universities or social media, to manipulate information flows in foreign countries. Sharp power has grown exponentially with the development of digital technology.

Power is the ability to influence the behaviour or thinking of others by means of coercion (**hard power**), convincing (**soft power**) or manipulation (**sharp power**).

Leadership

Leadership is traditionally connected to hard power, as demonstrated by the notion of the warrior-king that still resonates in the image that some of today’s leaders like to portray. But what did leadership look like during the global trend that replaced power and prestige with peace and cooperation?

Leadership has been a topic of research in Humanities for a long time, and a helpful analysis has been provided by one of the founding fathers of sociology, Max Weber (d. 1920). According to him, a key notion to understand leadership is **authority**. He argues that authority is based on the belief that people have about the legitimacy of a person’s authority. He then distinguishes three types of authority: **traditional authority** is based on the belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions (examples are hereditary royalty, whether as clan chiefs, kings or emperors); **legal authority** is based on the belief of the legality of rules according to which a person is appointed in an authoritative role (like the elected president, the appointed professor or judge); **charismatic authority** is based on the devotion to exceptional qualities of the individual person (e.g., Hitler, Napoleon, Ghandi, Mandela). Ideally, these three types will overlap, as has been the case with some popes: their authority is enshrined in traditions that go back for almost nineteen centuries, while each pope is elected according to a strict procedure, and some popes enjoy charismatic qualities due to their character or policies.

Traditional and legal authority in Asia

In the second half of the twentieth century, Asian countries have seen quite some instances where female prime ministers and presidents were elected who were the daughters or spouses of male leaders of their countries, thereby combining hereditary and legal authority: Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Indira Ghandi of India, Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wazed of Bangladesh, Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, Park Geun-hye of South Korea, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar.

Figure III.1
Martial leadership



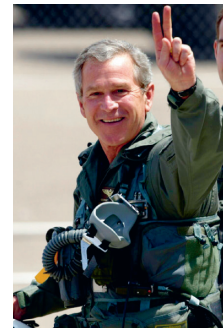
Vladimir Putin (Russia)



Kim Jong-Un (North Korea)



Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom)



*George W. Bush
(United States)*

Another element of authority that Weber points out, is the context, or the moment in history in which the authority is displayed. For instance, Churchill was very unpopular in pre-war times because of his hard-power rhetoric, but he rose to the occasion during the Second World War, only to be voted out of office immediately after the war. Simply put: ‘hard’ times seem to require hard-power leaders while times of peace and rebuilding require soft-power leaders. This may explain the dominance of soft power during the second half of the twentieth century: most Western states were recovering from a devastating world war while the former colonies were gaining independence and were building their own states. Hard power was not absent, however: the Cold War led to numerous proxy wars where ‘communist’ forces backed by the Soviet-Union were pitted against ‘liberal’ and autocratic forces backed by the United States, just like the process of de-colonization in some instances was forced by wars, and the establishment of new states out of former colonies often resulted in autocratic regimes trying to bend these new states to their will.

The philosopher Joseph Raz distinguishes between two kinds of authority. **‘Normal’ authority** is when people accept someone’s authority because it is in their interest. **‘Deviant’ authority** is when one feels obligated to obey, like deference to one’s parents or by ideas like nationalism or religion.

(Joseph Raz, *Authority*, 1990)

Multi- and unilateralism

During the second half of the twentieth century, international cooperation prevailed. These decades were dominated by leaders who favored cooperation and negotiation with an international focus. They adopted a **multilateral** approach, seeing benefit in international cooperation. The number and types of international treaties were unprecedented. But while many leaders may have aspired to world peace, the goal of the multilateral approach ultimately remained national: only through multilateralism could conflicts about trade, values, and the use of resources be prevented and, consequently, the national interests be safeguarded. Since the second decade of the 21st century, however, we have been observing an increase in popularity of leaders who are tough, less diplomatic, and with an exclusively national focus. They resort to a **unilateral** approach, meaning that they see no benefit in international cooperation to promote national interests. (For the resulting global trend – and to some: global challenge – of ‘multipolarization’ that is taking place since the 2010s, see chapter ‘Post-colonialism and decolonization’.)

Multilateralism refers to two states or more communicating in the pursuit of their interests. **Unilateralism** refers to the preference of a state to pursue its interests without consulting, agreeing or cooperating with other states.

The reasons for the unilateral approach can be found in the 3-Is and appear to be two-fold. On the one hand, the sentiment held by these leaders is that the results of international cooperation are not enhancing but limiting the national *interests*. This was one of the main reasons for the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in 2020: while there were plenty of benefits from being part of this regional organization, it was considered better to be able to make decisions without the influence of European rules. Whereas this motivation for unilateralists is related to interests, the other motivation is about *identity*: the unilateralists feel that internationalization and globalization is contaminating their national identity, and they therefore resort to politics of defending and restoring that identity.

In either case, unilateralists feel the need to detach themselves from multilateral obligations so that they can set a national agenda in accordance with their own wishes. As a result, we can observe the debate about states rescinding their

membership from international organizations and agreements increase. Also, we can see an increasing popularity of *hard power*, unrestrained by international customary rules or agreements.

The way we think about power

In addition to this shifting trend in the international practice of power, the second half of the twentieth century also gave rise to a new way of thinking about power. This manifested mostly in academic circles. The academic approach of considering people as part of a social, cultural, religious or ethnic group, was gradually replaced by the new point of view that these groups were not fixed social categories but flexible social relations. In other words: these groups were the product of social relations, and they also produced social relations themselves. For example, it only makes sense to talk about a social underclass if there is a social upper class, just like it only makes sense to talk about men if there are women, or the religious if there is a secular. These social positions are considered not to be static, but subject to relations of power. For that reason, the term 'slave' has been replaced by 'enslaved', to indicate that it is a social situation that can only occur if somebody is doing the enslaving and that the status of slavery is not a matter of choice for those who are subjected to it.

This way of viewing relations between people has become dominant since the late twentieth century, both in the academic and in the political domain. An important consequence is that certain social and political situations are not considered static or self-evident, such as the dominant position of the West, the patriarchy or the authority of the clergy, but that they are products of power relations. That means that such relations do not need to be accepted as fixed but can be challenged. Whereas opposition to power relations is of course not new and humankind has a long history of challenging those in power, what has shifted is that these power relations are no longer considered in terms of *groups* of fixed social status (women, laborers, the enslaved) who revolt against their oppressor, but as relations that *individuals* have with their social environment. This view allows for more realism when describing social situations but also creates more complexity. For instance, the laborer who protests the abuses of his employer may very well find it natural that his wife should obey him and that he should abide by the counsel of the local priest. Just like a former colony can still suffer from the continued political and economic power exercised by the former colonizer and at the same time maintain a harsh security apparatus and outlaw homosexuality. (See also Chapters 'Equality' and 'Identity').

Further reading

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Christopher Walk and Jessica Ludwig, *From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power'. Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World* (report), National Endowment for Democracy, 2017

CHAPTER 2

Identity

Identity is not fixed, it is what people name themselves or others. The process of identifying is often one of binary opposites: civilized versus barbarian, man versus woman, believer versus non-believer, city versus countryside dweller, local versus foreign. Such identification may carry social, political and legal qualifications because it implies that people have a different status and different rights. As a result, identification can also be intended to indicate another binary: superiority versus inferiority.

'Othering'

One way of identifying one-self is by opposing one's identity to the identity of others: us-them, black-white, civilized-barbaric, male-female, sane-sick, native-foreign. This process is called Othering. Such binaries are sometimes made for a lack of clear self-definition, but sometimes also to claim superiority towards the 'other'.

While we may refer to identity and identification as a global structure, it's also subject to global trends. For instance, from the 1950s through the 1970s, it was common to identify people in terms of class. This was a Marxist concept to analyze people's needs and predicaments, and to describe the political and social relations on a national and global scale. Looking at humankind through the lens of class determined how governments made policy, how history was studied, how people regarded each other. For instance, some states made a point of including different 'classes' of the population – like 'laborers' or 'women' – in their parliamentary representation by allotting them a reserved number of seats. Starting in the 1990s, however, this lens of class identity was replaced by identities like race, religion, gender. As a result, attention to and interest in social and economic class differentiations in society has diminished, even though these differentiations are still very much existent.

Marxist class theory: the history of the Haitian independence war

In his seminal study *The Black Jacobins* from 1938, the black historian C.L. James from Trinidad describes the causes and developments of the slave revolt of Haiti which resulted in the independence of that country. His description and analysis of the colonial oppression on Haiti is entirely framed in (Marxist) terms of property and class, and hardly refers to the issue of race.

From the 1990s onwards, we observe two new global trends in identity and identification that take place across the 3-D chessboard of human interactions. On a local, national, and global level there is the emergence of so-called identity politics. On a social and academic level we can observe the increasing popularity of understanding human relations in terms of individual identity. We will discuss both below.

Identity politics

Since the 1980s, politicians and states, but also people in general, have shown an increasing tendency to label their societies with a distinct identity that goes beyond the average self-awareness of any nation. Mostly these are religious identities: Hindu nationalism in India, Islam as a state identity in various countries with a Muslim-majority, Judeo-Christian civilization in European countries, or the exact opposite by identifying with non-religion, as is the case with secularism in France. Others are social-cultural: Nordic culture in Scandinavian societies, African culture in African countries, the revival of various native cultures around the world, to name but a few examples.

To some observers, these identifications are not trends but innate to underlying civilizations. The political scientist Samuel Huntington elaborated this idea in the 1990s and developed it into a world map of civilizations that he labelled mostly with religious identities (Confucian, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox) and partly with geographical-cultural identities (Western, Japanese, Latin American, African). His use of different identity markers – geographic and religious – was criticized by quite some scholar (what, then, are the criteria of a ‘civilization’?), but what generated most discussion was Huntington’s assertion that the identity differences between these civilizations would cause global conflicts.

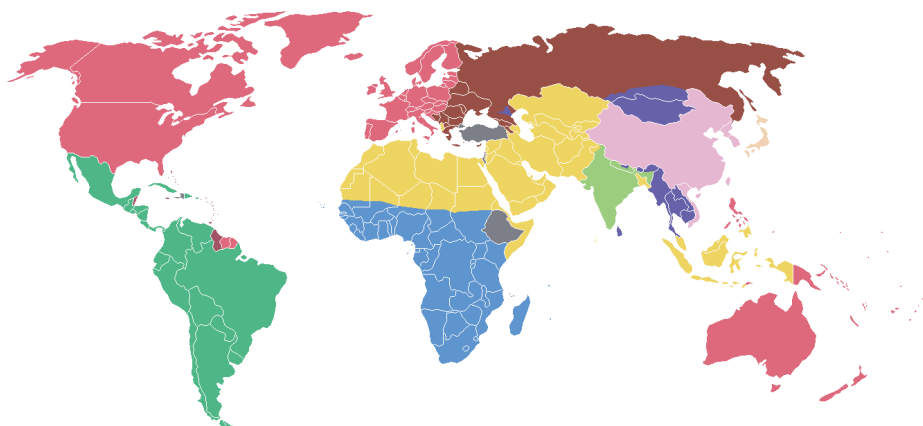


Figure III.2.1 Huntingtons' classification of 'civilizations'

However, what Huntington was predicting seemed to reflect the reality on the ground: many states and people had started to identify themselves in categories that went beyond the identity of the community, the nation or the state. This created new and, arguably, imaginary realms or regions in which people felt bonded through a particular identity. And yes, these realms also entailed a sentiment of conflict. For instance, the notion of a 'Judeo-Christian' culture as invoked by several politicians and political parties in European countries was mostly intended to counter the perceived corruption of domestic cultures by foreign cultures (particularly Islam) introduced by immigrants. In countries with a Muslim majority, the identification with Islam has caused tensions with non-Muslim minority communities, sometimes on a national level in the form of Islamic legislation that discriminates non-Muslims, sometimes on a local level by Muslims who, emboldened by the pronounced Islamic identity of their state, started to harass non-Muslims. A similar development is taking place in India, where the government of the Hindu national party contributed to already existing tensions between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority. And in Russia, the self-identification of a greater Russia with Orthodox roots entailed the reclaiming of former empirical territories, and was one of the justifications to invade Ukraine in 2022.

The question is whether these processes are a cause or effect. Is identity inherently part of regional 'civilizations' and are these identities now being abused, causing tensions and even violence? This is what Huntington claims, arguing that such civilizations and their clashes are global structures. Another view, however, holds that these processes are a recent global trend, in other words self-identification is a recent phenomenon that has contributed to the establishment of regional identities. Regardless of the correct explanation of these developments, we are witnessing the increasing popularity of national and regional identity formation and the confrontations they invoke. More importantly, in many instances, these national and regional identities have turned into identity politics that can take extremist forms, as illustrated by Jewish (not always Israeli) settlers on the West Bank, white supremacists in Western countries, Muslim extremist organizations in various countries with a Muslim majority, and Hindu nationalists in India.

Self-identification as discussed so far focuses on the national and regional levels. But (self)-identification also takes place on a global scale. In the 1950s, during the Cold War, Western countries distinguished between the (rich) 'First World' and (poor) 'Third World', with communist countries occupying the position of 'Second World'. Later, a dichotomy was made between 'Developed' and 'Underdeveloped' countries, which in turn was changed into what was considered the more politically correct terminology of 'Developed' and 'Developing' countries. From the 1990s onwards, with the rise of former 'developing' countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, China and several Southeast Asian countries as economic powers, a new terminology came into place: the global North and the global South. This distinction

is made in several ways. One is economic: the countries of the global North are said to be in political and economic decline, whereas those of the global South are, or are expected to be, in a political and economic lift. Another distinction is political and based on a post-colonial resentment: the global South is accusing the global North of not living up to moral, democratic and international legal standards it claims to uphold. In other words, the global South is challenging the global North's assumed position of superiority. An example is Israel's 2023-24 war in Gaza: most countries in the global North maintained their support of Israel, while most countries in the global South supported the Palestinians, and South Africa even brought Israel up on charges of genocide before the International Court of justice.

Putin: sovereignty of 'civilizational states'

According to Russian president Putin, the world is divided in civilizations, and each civilization is ruled by several powerful states. Only such 'civilizational states' are entitled to sovereignty and leadership within their civilizations. The other states in that civilization have no full sovereignty.

(Maria Lagutina et. al., *The Routledge Handbook of Russian International Relations Studies*, 2023)

Individual identification

We now live in times when people increasingly take the initiative to self-identify rather than conform to labels or assumptions imposed by others. This may put them outside of the group that they would normally be identified with, like those considered to be men who self-identify as women. Self-identification and the identification by others may also yield very different perceptions: someone who self-identifies as an aristocrat may be identified by others as a black person, just like the person who self-identifies as the CEO of a company may be identified by others as a woman. Scholars have been trying to come up with labels that can serve as neutral identifiers. That has turned out to be challenging because the charged historical legacy of some terminology.

Race

'Race' is one of these terms: it was used to refer to hereditary qualities of groups of people. This was a common practice all over the world: the Chinese, for instance, considered people with dark skins or 'ash-white' skins to be inferior. However, it was the Europeans who brought this notion to a global level. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the biological sciences in Europe tried to categorize all living things, including humankind. They did not only identify but also hierarchized

the so-called human races. It was the kind of scientific research that quickly had political and social repercussions because it was used to justify the way Europeans (including those living in Australia and the two Americas) perceived the world in which they envisaged themselves the pinnacle of power and civilization. The notion of race thus became very much part of the European colonial practices and terminology that was applied across the world.

Origin of 'race'

The first use of the term 'race' has been traced back to fifteenth century Spain, where the three religious communities – Christians, Jews, Muslims – were called *razzas*. This term denoted a human quality that was based on blood 'purity' and ancestry. Hence, Muslims and Jews who converted to Catholicism were not considered 'real' Christians, and even their children and grandchildren retained the name *morisco* (for Christians of Muslim origin) and *converso* (for Christians of Jewish origin).

There has been overall academic consensus since the 1950s that the notion of 'race' holds little meaning in the biological and natural sciences and that categories of human 'races' are artificial. Genetic analyses have shown that there is enormous genetic diversity *within* so-called 'races' (like white, black, or other) while only a small percentage of genetic diversity exists *between* these races. In other words, the notion of a biological race based on an isolated gene pool is factually untrue. However, the phenotypes (the visible appearances) of human beings still play an important role in social interactions. Social scientists, when studying how social groups interact, see the need to use the terminology of 'race' when discussing social interactions based on phenotype. Today, the notion of 'race' is therefore a socio-political rather than a scientific concept.

'Race does not travel'

Racial identification (when people are said to be 'white', or 'black', or 'coloured', or otherwise) differs from social place to place and is therefore context related.

(Paul C. Taylor, *Race. A Philosophical Introduction*, 2022 (3rd edition))

Racism

The use of racial concepts is not a recent phenomenon. It is of all times and all peoples. But Western racism stands out in a very specific way because it is the legacy of a past in which the Western world had so much influence in the world that they could define race and impose it on the daily lives of most of the world population.

While the notion of race has since then been discarded in most academic disciplines, the notion of racism has become very popular in the Humanities. This may sound paradoxical, but it is not, because there are two different elements at play: *race* is about biological quality, while *racism* is about social behavior. Racism is based on differences in phenotypes and on the assumption that these differences also represent different cultural, intellectual or even biological qualities.

We must also keep in mind that what constitutes racism is often determined by national contexts. Much academic knowledge today about racism is produced by American universities, where the historical context of trans-Atlantic slavery and particular forms of slavery and ensuing forms of discrimination play a central role in these academic discussions. These circumstances are different from, for instance, the issue of race in South America where the Spanish conquerors and colonizers upheld different racial concepts and practices compared to those that affected black people in North America. And the notions of race and racism were yet again different in the experiences and practices in Africa, the Arab world, India, and South-East Asia.

‘Whiteness’ is a concept that is used in racism discourse to describe social power structures that prevailed among middle and upper classes in Western societies during times of colonialism. Whiteness stands for what is assumed to be the average standard of living that, in turn, is considered by those in power to be the measure stick of all society. Whiteness, therefore, is not necessarily related to skin colour: it is an imagined state of being that is said to be pervasive across the world. The concept proposes that these structures are still dominant in Western societies, but also on a global scale.

Other terms

While the concept of ‘racism’ has become one of the more prevalent concepts used in Humanities to understand social interactions, other terminology is also still in use. The result is an array of notions with overlapping meanings. For instance, whereas race refers to the phenotype of a person or people, **ethnicity** refers to a common culture and origin. For instance, black people can have different ethnicities (Caribbean, West-African, Afro-American). Another term, already used in this textbook, is **nation**, which refers to a community that has (or perceives) a bond based on culture, language, history, and religion.

This terminology can become quite confusing. For instance, the term **nationality** never refers to membership of a nation, but always to that of state. And not all people belonging to the same nation share the same ethnicity. Imagine, for example, people of Iranian origin who have lived in Germany for three generations and have

German nationality: to what ethnicity and nation do they belong? Often this is a matter of (self-)identification more than biological or social accuracy.

Nation or ethnicity?

Nation and ethnicity are almost synonyms: they both refer to a group of people that share a common culture, background and origin. In common parlance, however, it appears that 'ethnicity' also refers to the phenotype (the visible appearances) of the group members.

A term that used to be popular among social scientists and historians during the 1960s, is **class**. This refers to a social standing based on wealth and, as a derivative of that wealth, a social position that can be hereditary. For instance, aristocrats derived their social status from their wealth, which used to be the income from the lands or commercial enterprises they owned, and their children would benefit from this. Today, even though the aristocracy may have lost much of its standing, having the means to afford good education, health care and housing, contributes to one's social advancement and position in society. Typical of class – and opposed to markers like ethnicity, gender or race – is that social positions can be lost or attained, which usually depends on the person's income. The relation with the other markers is that every racial, ethnic or national group has class stratifications. However, ethnicity often trumps class: people may be very rich but can still be looked down upon if their family pedigree, ethnic background or color of their skin does not match that of the dominant group, for instance.

The complexity of 'diversity'

Companies, governments, universities, and other institutions in Western countries try to overcome the 'white' exclusivity of their staff, employees and students by implementing so-called diversity policies. However, the focus thereby is often on race and ethnicity, and little on class. By overlooking this social-economic dimension, the diversity runs the risk of being lopsided.

One other term of social classification is **gender**. This is a category that is found in all other categories. The trend of individuals determining and proclaiming their own identity is perhaps best demonstrated by the case of gender: the traditional dichotomies of man-woman and homosexual-heterosexual have been opened up to include a wide array of gender identities. While this may appear to be a new development, the novelty of it is not the existence of these multiple identities – these

have existed for as long as humankind – but the fact that they have become part of public and political debate.

Transgender in Iran

In Iran, transgender operations are allowed and widely practiced. However, only one of two outcomes is allowed: the person can only be a man or a woman. All other gender modalities are not accepted, nor is homosexuality which is a capital crime.

Scholars realize that all these categories can be fluid and overlapping and can come together in one and the same person. For this reason, the notion of **intersectionality** was introduced. This concept holds that a person's vulnerability to discrimination or oppression is often not caused by a single category of identity. An example is the black woman, where race and gender play 'intersecting' roles in the manner how she is treated. The status of class will play an additional role: is this black woman well-to-do and with a high-profile job, or does she live in a poor neighborhood doing night shifts?

Gender statistics

"Between 2019 and 2022, nearly 40% of countries – home to over 1.1 billion women and girls in 2022 – stagnated or declined on gender equality."

(2024 SDG Gender Index)

Best performing countries (2024) in closing the gender gap in economy, health, education, politics:

1. Iceland
2. Finland
3. Norway
4. New Zealand
5. Sweden
6. Nicaragua
7. Germany
8. Namibia
9. Ireland
10. Spain

(Global Gender Gap Report, 2024)

Globalization and glocalization of identity

We have seen that identity plays a role on the individual level and increasingly also on the national level (identity politics), sometimes even on a global level (North-South tensions). But two events that happened locally were to propel the issues of race and gender to a global level. In 2018, the accusations of sexual abuse against Hollywood tycoon Harvey Weinstein contributed to the worldwide popularity of the social movement known as #MeToo. It would reopen debates across the globe on power and violence in gender relations. A year later, in 2019, the killing of a black man by the name of George Floyd by a white police officer did the same for the social movement known as Black Lives Matter: their protests in the United States sparked mass demonstrations across the world.

In both instances, the focus was on power and violence in race and gender relations. These issues had been raised time and again for decades but now gained a global attention that seems to have brought on a significant change: not only did victims feel empowered to speak out and did perpetrators have less of an opportunity to get away with their behavior, but progress was also made on a governmental and institutional level to address these social structures. At the same time, however, there were strong counter forces across the globe that wanted to maintain the dominant structures of the man-woman gender division, preferably embedded in a patriarchal system. In Western societies, a racial component was added to these counter forces that argued for preserving the nation's authenticity.

Further reading

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Equality and self-determination

The notion of equality is not new to humankind: several religions claim it as a cornerstone of their creed (because everyone is a believer regardless of rank or status) and it was declared a key element to the ‘rights of men’ as included in the French and American constitutions in the late 18th century. However, when in 1776 the American Declaration of Independence declared that “all men are created equal,” this was not referring to women or those who were enslaved. And in Europe of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, only rich (white) men had the right to vote. Communist Russia and China implemented a strict equality, but ultimately these states were run by a small elite.

It took until the 1950s to make a serious start with putting the value of equality into practice. True equality – that is: regardless of gender, color, social class or religion – became enshrined in the constitutions of most states. Often it remained a mere intention and the goal of true equality has in many instances still not been reached, mostly because of obstruction by embedded social structures like patriarchy and racism. But given its legal status, equality was something that could be claimed by those who were willing to fight for it. Equality had become the rule, even if social reality did not live up to it. This was a distinct difference from the many centuries preceding the twentieth, when the opposite was the case: inequality was the rule, and only sometimes did social reality live up to it.

Patriarchy is the main obstacle to gender equality. Patriarchy is defined as “a system of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political, social, and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women” (Catherine Nash in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 2020). Patriarchy has a very long tradition in human history and can therefore be considered a **global structure**.

Tolerance

In the past centuries, the closest one could get to equality was tolerance. Today one still hears the call for tolerance, often in conjunction with equality. But tolerance is a different concept entirely. Tolerance means that one endures something that one disagrees with. In earlier times, societies were called tolerant when people with different ideas or behavior were nevertheless accepted. Usually this was the case with religion. Such tolerance was exercised by those in power: they made

the decision to be benevolent towards those with views or beliefs with which they disagreed or simply disliked. They could just as easily have decided not to do so.

Toleration (i.e., the practice of tolerance), therefore, is always connected to power and to a situation of inequality: those in power may dislike a belief, or a behavior, or a certain race of people, but nevertheless decide to exercise tolerance. A Catholic King may tolerate his Jewish subjects, a general may tolerate insubordination, a mother may tolerate her children being impolite. One never speaks of toleration in the opposite direction: Jewish subjects do not 'tolerate' their Catholic King, soldiers will not 'tolerate' their general, and children will not 'tolerate' their mother. The reasons to tolerate something or not can range from pragmatism (toleration to avoid conflict) to morality (toleration as a moral obligation to allow for another person's convictions).

This is what we may call **power tolerance**, and this has been the practice all over the world throughout the centuries. This changed radically, however, with the introduction of equality as a political and social right. Because if all people are equal, regardless of gender, color, social class, or religion, and everyone is equally entitled to the same rights and freedoms, who, then, decides to tolerate people or not? Not the king, not the government, not the majority. Equality therefore became one of the most drastic changes in the social fabric of societies worldwide. It would gradually uproot long-lived social structures and traditions that were based on distinctions among people.

In doing so, the notion of tolerance would gain an additional meaning. In a society based on equality, toleration has come to mean that one needs to tolerate the differences one is being confronted with. Equality dictates that all people, regardless of their differences, have the right to be who they want to be. Toleration has therefore shifted from power toleration to **acceptance toleration**. This does not mean that power toleration has disappeared – to the contrary, in many societies one observes that the claim for equal treatment ('I claim the right to be who I want to be, just like anyone else has that same claim') is often countered by power tolerance ('your exclusive behavior is not tolerated, you should adapt to the majority').

Equality is a global trend that shows all the signs of becoming a global structure, because for most people today the notion of equality is self-evident. But to establish equality as a legal right does not mean that it is socially accepted. One may even wonder if there are places today where equality has been fully and truly established. But it remains a fact that the notion of equality has firmly established itself in the minds of people today. From a historical perspective, this is a revolutionary development, and we are still in the middle of it.

Power tolerance: Andalusia

Between the 8th and 15th century, Muslim rulers in Andalusia allowed Christians and Jews to freely practice their religion. But any opposition or criticism by the non-Muslims was not tolerated. The Catholic Kings, when they conquered Spain, at first maintained this same system of tolerance towards the Muslims and the Jews. But by the late 15th century they gave Muslims and Jews the choice to convert to Catholicism or to leave the country.

Equality, equity, and equivalence

Equality among people

The principle of equality is one of the key notions used in constitutions and international human rights agreements. Equality was first interpreted as a legal right to equal treatment in similar cases (see chapter ‘Human Rights’). For instance, men, women, people of color, or disabled people should all have equal access to jobs (provided they meet the qualifications for that job), and equal pay for the same job. The means to reach this type of equality was the creation of **equal opportunity** for everyone: everyone had the right to vote, to apply for a job, to participate in meetings and races, to receive the same salary.

But even when the principle of equality was translated into law, practice showed differently. The *rule* of equality showed to be insufficient to reach the *goal* of equality: in most societies where the rule of equality was upheld, differences in gender, ethnicity, social class remained intact. Apparently, mechanisms of discrimination among people were – and are – still in place as patterns of pervasive social practices and structures that are hard to combat. For instance, a building may be ‘open for all’ but it isn’t if it only has staircases; a race does not provide the same opportunity for winning if one person is well nourished and the other is underfed; and in a school program that treats all pupils equally, pupils with educated parents who can help with schoolwork have greater advantage than those who do not.

‘Empty idea of equality’

Equality has no value content of its own. Consequently, giving everyone an income of 100 euro serves equality as much as giving everyone nothing. This is called the ‘empty idea of equality’.

(Peter Westen, *The Empty Idea of Equality*, 1982)

To remedy this, the notion of **equity** was introduced. Whereas equality stands for treating everyone the same by providing equal opportunity for all, equity allows for treating each individual differently depending on needs and backgrounds, and by doing so levelling the playing field for all participants. Equity, therefore, argues for tailor-made approaches for people so that they have the opportunity reach the position in which they can participate and compete equally with others. Someone had voiced this idea as follows: “Equality is giving everyone a shoe, equity is giving everyone a shoe that fits.”*

It must be noted that equity, too, has its critics, the predominant argument being that equity’s individual differentiation may lead to preferential treatment, which is considered contrary to equality. Should, for instance, preference been given to hiring women, people of color, disabled people, or others? It is against equal treatment, but the supporters of equity will argue that one first needs to create a balanced composition of personnel before one can start treating them equally. From this perspective, equity is the way to arrive at an equal situation. An interesting element of the concept of equity is that it has been given much importance in the international discussions on sustainable development (see chapter ‘Sustainable Development’).

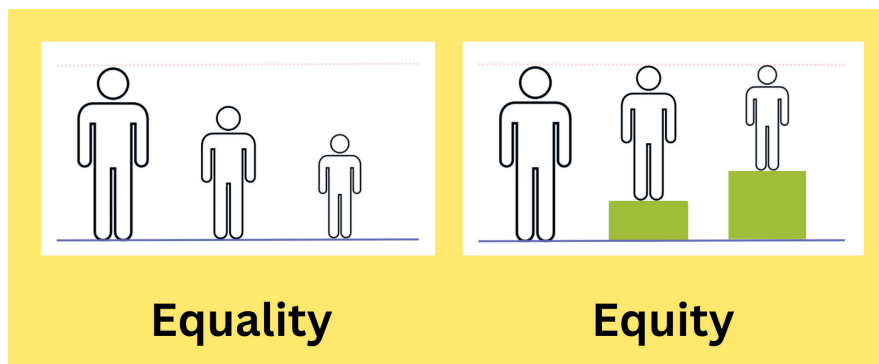


Figure III.3.1 Equality and equity

Another response by the critics of the notion of equality is that of **equivalence**. This plays out mostly in the situation of gender relations between men and women. The advocates of equivalence argue that men and women are biologically different and are therefore not to be treated as the same. But rather than arguing for a patriarchal order between men and women, they call for ‘equality in dignity’: men and women are said to be different people with different potentials (and some say: different roles), but they are equal in those different positions. This ‘different but equal’ has been heavily criticized by supporters of the (legal) notion of equality who point at the risk that ‘equality in dignity’ allows for denying women the same rights as men.

* Attributed to Susan K. Gardner, Oregon State University.

Equality among states

Equality not only pertains to people. A similar development is taking place among states. The traditional hierarchy of states – the rich and militarily powerful at the top – has been disrupted by the establishment of the United Nations and by the de-colonization process: the number of states has since then quadrupled and every state is officially an equal among peers. Perhaps China, America, or Russia consider themselves rulers of the world, but every other state of that world is accorded the same equal standing as they have. And former colonizers might still look down upon countries that once were their colonies but these now need to be treated as equal counterparts.

In the same way as equality, the notion of equity also plays a role in international relations, even if the term ‘equity’ is not used in this respect. In the debates on climate change, for example, many countries of the global North argue that efforts need to be made by all countries equally. But many countries of the global South, while agreeing with the need for action on climate change, argue that they are already disadvantaged and therefore should not be burdened on an equal footing with rich and developed countries. This is, in effect, a claim to equitable treatment.

Even though equality among states is the rule of international law, it tells us nothing about the true power dynamics that are at play in the world. Luxembourg is a tiny country in the European Union, where France and Germany call the shots. The same is the case for Nigeria and South Africa in the African Union, and Russia, China, and America on the world stage. The political reality shows a continuous powerplay based on strength. Nevertheless, the generally accepted yardstick is the equality of states and of persons. But even so, the problem is the implementation of equality: there are no international legal mechanisms to uphold equal treatment between states, even when it is required by international law. Unequal treatment in the form of differentiation, favoritism and even discrimination is therefore still part of international politics.

Self-determination

Equality offers the opportunity to be who you want to be: there is no need to conform oneself to others, as everyone has the same right to live how they want to. A similar situation also applies to states, but here it is called self-determination. Self-determination is the right of a nation to determine its own destiny. Self-determination can take different forms: as a state, or as a form of minority rights within a state.

Self-determination is a relatively recent concept. It was closely linked to the ideology of nationalism in the nineteenth century, because both self-determination and nationalism claim a territorial space in which a nation can live according

to its own customs and desires. And just like nationalism, the notion of self-determination became a slogan that mobilized people, first by Lenin who called for the self-determination of the proletariat, but perhaps even more so by the American president Woodrow Wilson in 1918 at the peace talks after the First World War. The German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires had been defeated, and the victors were deciding what to do with the vast territories of these conquered empires and with the many different nations that lived in these territories. Wilson then famously declared: “National aspirations must be respected; people may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. ‘Self-determination’ is not a mere phrase; it is an imperative principle of action.”*

For some nations, like the Poles and the Hungarians and Czechs, this resulted in creation of their own states. Others, like the Kurds and the Middle Eastern Arabs, were disappointed that they were not granted statehood. It also quickly became clear that self-determination was not intended for the many peoples living under colonial rule. But the idea would resonate strongly around the world. Later, in 1945, the United Nations adopted self-determination as one of its goals, placing it notably alongside equality: “To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.”** This would become one of the key motivations and justifications for people to claim independence or autonomy within a state.

Examples of minority nations that have autonomy within a state

Native Americans in the United States (also: North American Indians, Indian Tribes, or Indigenous people of America) have limited rule over their own lands where they can apply their own laws and have their own law enforcement. However, they are subject to Federal law.

Kurds in Iraq have an autonomous region in north Iraq with their own government, parliament, and judiciary system, and that pursues its own foreign policy. However, it is part of the federal administration of Iraq.

Catalans in Spain are one of the 17 ‘autonomous communities’ (*comunidad autónoma*) that has limited political and administrative powers. Their call for full independence in 2017 was not recognized by the state of Spain.

‘Bantustans’ were supposed to be independent, self-governing territories for black people in South Africa during apartheid, but in practice they remained controlled by the government of South Africa.

* Woodrow Wilson, address to Congress on International Order, 11 February 1918.

** Article 1 (2) of the United Nations Charter.

Like equality, self-determination is a recent global trend that appears to be developing into a global structure. Self-determination may be enshrined as a fundamental right, but this does not guarantee that it will always be respected as there are enough examples in the world of peoples ('nations') being denied their right to self-determination. In many cases this denial is justified on the grounds that it would undermine the sovereignty of the state to which such nations belong.

Palestine in the United Nations

Several Israeli government leaders in the period between 1948 and 1993 have argued that Palestinians were not a nation by themselves but part of the larger 'Arab' nation. This argument was used to deny Palestinians the right of self-determination and, consequently, their right to their own state. In 1993 Israel did recognize the Palestinians as a nation, but not as a state. In 2012, the 'state of Palestine' was given observer status in the United Nations. By 2024, Palestine was recognized as a state by 143 of the 193 states in the world but was still denied (by American veto) full membership as a state in the United Nations. This left the nation of Palestinians with the paradoxical situation that they could not fully exercise their right of self-determination and establish a functioning state, but at the same time were recognized as such by most of the world.

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CHAPTER 4

Secularization and religionization

The twentieth century has witnessed an interesting turn in the global structure of religion: in the first half of the twentieth century, until the 1970s, the world was averse to religion, while since the 1970s the world has witnessed the increasing importance of religion in all facets of life, including social and political.

Secularization

From the late nineteenth century, the world witnessed a gradual decline of religion in two ways: it lost its importance to people and its institutional importance to the state. In other words, people were less religious than before, and religious institutions did not have the same power as before. This process is called secularization.

The exact reasons for secularization are still debated, but it is generally believed that it was motivated by modernity and the popularity of rationalism. **Rationalism** had its roots primarily in 18th century European thought where knowledge, gained through facts and empirical inquiry became prevalent and a source of refutation of beliefs held by religion. This way of thinking was spread around the world, mainly through colonial educational institutions, and it challenged the self-evidence of truths upheld by religious beliefs. **Modernity** also originated in the Western world and has multiple meanings, but is used here in terms of advances in technology (steam engines, electricity, telephone and telegraph, etc.) and state institutionalization (bureaucracy, codification, postal service, parliament, etc.). Modernity gave people self-confidence and a sense of progress away from the mostly religious traditions and institutions that were now considered redundant. Modernity, also, spread around the world through colonialism, but it was particularly prevalent in decolonizing countries: most leaders of new post-colonial states preferred a modern state similar in structure to that of their former colonizing masters.

This combined development of secularization, modernity and rationalism was coined by scholars as the **secularization thesis**, which, in summary, argued that the more modernity advanced, the more religion would disappear. And indeed, all over the world, including Asia, Africa, South America, one could observe the secularization of societies, especially in the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. In retrospect, is it difficult to imagine that female students in the universities of Kabul, Tehran, or Baghdad wore short skirts and no headscarves (see image). Similarly, religious institutions like the Catholic Church, or the Hindu or Muslim clergy, had little if any influence on society and state affairs.



Figure III.4.1 Students in Kabul, Afghanistan, 1972

Two religious homelands

Examples of this secularization are the countries of Israel and Pakistan. Both were created as religious homelands: Pakistan in 1947 as homeland for the Muslims in British India, and Israel in 1948 as homeland for the Jews from Europe. Their stories of conception, birth, and growth are quite similar. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews in Europe and Muslims in British India, began to think of a place for themselves. While they identified as Jews and Muslims, they did not necessarily mean it in a religious sense. Most European Jews who supported the idea of a Jewish homeland were quite secular, and the same was true of many of the Muslims in British India who entertained a similar idea of a homeland. For both communities, the urge for a homeland was not primarily religious, but was a response to discrimination: the Jews in an increasingly antisemitic Europe, and the Muslims in the Hindu-majority India. Their self-identification as Muslims and Jews was therefore more cultural than purely religious. So, when these homelands finally came into being, they were duly named the Jewish state and the Islamic state, but both states were quite non-religious in their identity and secular in their composition.

This changed in the 1970s. In both countries, the issue of religion increasingly played a role in questions of national identity. Only Jews could obtain Israeli nationality, but who is a Jew? The state of Israel was discussed more in biblical terms, and the claim to the West Bank was justified as a religious birthright. The term anti-Semitism, commonly used to refer to discrimination or hatred of Jews,

was now also interpreted to include criticism of Israel. Similarly in Pakistan, questions were raised about non-Muslims serving as ministers in the government, and there were increasing calls for more Islamic legislation. This development is called 'religionization'.

'Religionization'

Since the 1970s, religion has gained in importance everywhere in the world (except in Europe, which has remained secularized for reasons that are still unclear). In this textbook we will call this development '**religionization**', which means that religion became important to people in their personal, societal, and sometimes political lives. Why this happened, and why at this particular time, remains a question and is hotly debated by scholars but there is a consensus that the secularization thesis turned out to be incorrect.

The 'religionization' of the world has manifested itself in different ways. For some, it is a personal matter practiced in the privacy of the home, but many also feel the need to practice this religion together. This has led to places of worship filling up but also to new ones being built. In some cases, these religious gatherings have reached enormous proportions, with huge mosques and mega-churches in Asia or West Africa or the use of stadiums.

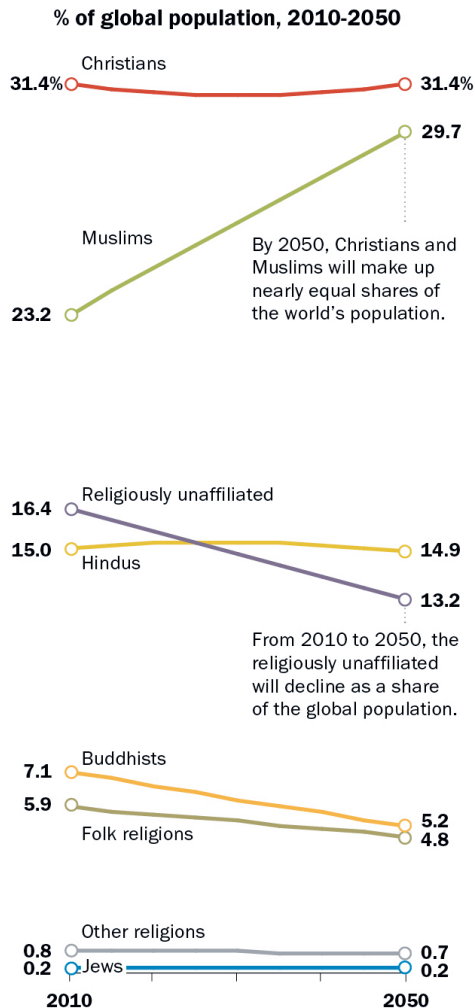
For many believers, religion also has a social significance. As a result, the number of religious associations, organizations and societies around the world has grown exponentially. Some would focus on poverty, others on development, health care or emergency relief. Most of them are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), also known as faith-based organizations (FBOs). As such, they are a manifestation of civil society.

But there are also believers for whom religion is a source of inspiration for how society should be governed or structured. Here we enter the realm of politics. For some, this goal is to be achieved through a political party that is founded on religious principles. Others may form lobbying groups to pressure governments to intervene in certain social issues, like abortion in America, or to expand territory, like the occupied lands in Israel, or to enforce religious rules like in India, Pakistan or northern Nigeria. Still others may go as far as to replace the government with some kind of theocracy, as was successfully done in Iran (in 1979) and is being sought by various Muslim groups around the globe.

Religionization means that religion has become important to people in their personal, societal, and sometimes also political lives.

The return of religion

Most scholars agree that religion has grown in importance, but find this difficult to prove. Sociological surveys provide statistics that tell us that by 2050 the number of Muslims will almost equal the number of Christians in the world, and that 4 out of every 10 Christians in the world will live in sub-Saharan Africa (see figure). In these predictions, India will in 2050 retain a Hindu majority but will also have the largest Muslim population of any country in the world, surpassing Indonesia.



"The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure III.4.2 Global growth of religion

However, such numbers must be treated with caution because they are demographic statistics that are extrapolations based on expected birth rates. So, if the Christians in a certain country are estimated to be a certain percentage of the population, and their birth rates are predicted to be another percentage, then a calculation is made about the increase or decrease of that Christian population. But such numbers tell us nothing about the religiosity of these people. One can call someone a Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian, but what does religion mean to them, personally, or in their social or political life? Also, there are many people who identify with a religion, but do not even practice it.

More enlightening, therefore, are surveys that examine how people self-identify as regards religion (see figure III.4.3). Such surveys tell us that the countries where people feel most religious are in Africa and Asia (with China as an unknown factor due to lack of research data), and with South America on the rise. It then may be surprising, then, that a country like Iran is not high on the list. This can be explained by the consideration that a state may profile itself as religious and impose religious rules on its population, but this does not necessarily have to reflect how that population feels about religion.

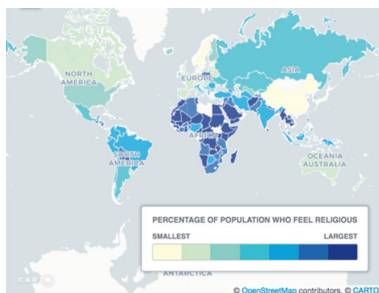


Figure III.4.3 Global experience of religiosity

Has religion, then, returned or, in other words, has it regained its original status and impact? The answer appears to be negative: religion has returned, but in a different form. Religion is not so much a force of power in the hands of the clergy, as it used to be, but in the hands of laypeople, people who are not clergy but who feel knowledgeable and confident enough to speak in name of religion. We may call this the **democratization of religion**: believers do not feel the need to follow religious doctrine or institutions because they prefer to speak and think for themselves. As a result, one observes the popularity of non-institutionalized preachers, sects and organizations. Whereas religion used to have a top-down structure, it has now become a bottom-up force. This means that the domain of religion is not dominated by clergy as it used to be, but by politicians, activists and self-appointed preachers. They do not speak in the name of religious institutions, but in the name of religion itself. And they do not only discuss religion in the private and religious sphere, but

also in the material, social and political sphere of today's world. That is why we find religion in today's discourses on topics as disparate as human rights, women's rights, environment, climate change, food production, sustainable development, peace and conflict.

Religious literacy

Secularization is still dominant in Europe. As a result, people have little affinity with and knowledge about religion. This has negatively affected Europeans working in functions abroad, like journalists, diplomats, aid workers: they interact with societies where religion plays a significant role in most domains of everyday social and political life, but they are unable to 'see' it. This is considered an impediment to successful functioning abroad. To remedy that, there are calls to increase their "religious literacy". That does not mean that they must become religious, or that they must like religion, but that they must understand the workings of religion in the modern world.

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Transnationalism

Migration is one of the global structures, as we have seen in chapter ‘Migration’, and so are the resulting **diasporas**, peoples who have permanently settled outside of their place of origin but still retain a bond as a nation. Examples of century-old diasporas are the Jews, Greeks and Chinese, who kept cultural, linguistic, religious and business ties with their community members across the borders.

From the late nineteenth century onward, migration that resulted in permanent settlement abroad increased significantly: Koreans migrated to Russia and China, Chinese and Europeans to the United States, Syrians and Lebanese to South America, Indians to Africa, to name just a few. A new surge of migration also took place after the Second World War, but this time the world witnessed a global inversion of migration: most migration was now towards Europe, at first from former colonies and for the recruitment of laborers from abroad, and later also for political and economic reasons.

Many of these peoples integrated into their new societies by identifying themselves as part of their new home, and many also maintained strong ties with their nation of origin. The interactions that the members of such communities maintain across borders is called **transnationalism**. These interactions usually relate to matters of family, religion or business, and are maintained with the country of origin, but often also with community members in other countries. In such instances, the identity of these people is also called a transnational identity because it transgresses national borders.

A **diaspora** consists of members belonging to a nation that have permanently settled in different places outside their place of origin and who retain a bond based on shared culture, language, religion. When this bond translates into cross-border interactions among people of this nation – like business or family relations – this is referred to as **transnationalism**.

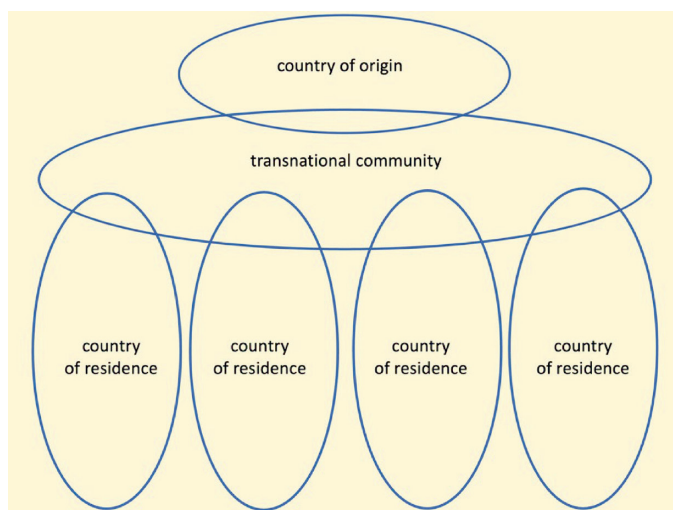


Figure III.5.1 Transnationalism

Transnational perspectives

Transnationalism as such is not new, but its occurrence has increased significantly since the 1990s. The reasons for this augmentation are not entirely clear but might be attributed to the increase of national self-identification (see chapter ‘Identity’) and to the increased availability of means of transport and communication. Irrespective of the exact reasons, academics and policy makers have started to pay more attention to this phenomenon. It has also provided new perspectives on a number of issues that were otherwise overlooked or considered self-evident. These issues will be discussed below.

National identity

There is a general assumption that growing up in a nation-state shapes people’s thinking, identity and outlook on the world and, in effect, contributes to the identification with the ‘nation’ through its shared history, culture and language. But this assumption is challenged by the citizens of that state who have migrated from other parts of the world. Will they give up their own history, culture and language? Or merge it with that of their new home country? And, more importantly, will these processes take place within the confines of the nation-state? Transnationalism shows that this is not the case. From the perspective of transnationalism, therefore, the notion of the nation-state as a closed container in which a national identity is being shaped, needs to be revisited.

Belonging

Belonging is a complex notion, that may be described as the emotion of 'feeling at home' which, in turn, is based on the bond that one feels with one's social, political and cultural environment, and is closely related to the concept of **imagined community**. However, this particular nation-state perspective may conflict with the transnational perspective. Do members of transnational communities feel a sense of belonging to their community, or to their country of residence, or to their country of origin, or perhaps to all of these simultaneously? For instance, the culture of the new country of residence may give a certain meaning to family or work relations, while the culture of the country of origin may add another layer of meaning to these relations. In that case, the culture of the country of origin is not being left behind but is taken along to the new country of residence. In other words, members of transnational communities share several social spheres or, as sociologists have termed it, '**habitats of meaning**' or environments that contain their own sets of values and meaning. Managing the multiple habitats of meaning is not always easy and may lead to what is referred to as **liminality**, which refers to a feeling of being 'in-between'. This term was originally used to describe the transition in rites of passage in non-industrial and traditional communities but is now also used to explain political and cultural transitions in general.

Liminality is the feeling of not really belonging, being 'here nor there'. It describes a temporary state of people who are in transition. It can apply to a variety of human situations, like migration, religious conversion, gender identity.

Loyalty

Whereas belonging has a socio-cultural meaning, the related notion of loyalty has a socio-political connotation. It can be defined as the unconditional fidelity that one has towards one's family, community, leader, religion or country. The quality of the unconditional is important: people loyal to a leader, for instance, tend to be forgiving for the leader's faults and the same is true for family members, religions and states. Loyalty also works the other way round: families, communities, leaders, religions or countries expect loyalty from its members.

But do members of transnational communities feel loyalty towards their community, their country of residence or their country of origin, or perhaps to all of these at the same time? These questions are not only important from a social perspective, they have strong political implications as well. Nationals of a country may feel sorry for someone who lacks a sense of belonging to that society, but they may be suspicious or even hostile to someone who lacks loyalty towards their country. Even though loyalty can be hard to measure, it manifests itself in very diverse ways. For instance, people may frown on transnational citizens cheering

for the national team of their country of origin rather than for that of their country of residence. Or transnationals may oppose military involvement of their country of residence in another country because their geopolitical views are rooted in the perspective of their country of origin rather than their country of residence. While this doesn't necessarily mean that these transnationals are less loyal to their country of residence, their loyalty may be questioned by others.

Foreign influences

Another aspect of transnationalism is the influence exerted by countries of origin on people who have migrated abroad and have become residents there. The reasons for this can vary. They can be economic when a country of origin is dependent on a steady inflow of remittances. Cultural or religious support for fellow nationals can be another reason, with countries of origin like Japan and Mexico who provide language schools abroad, or Turkey and Morocco who send imams.

Some countries of origin reach out because they still consider these transnationals to be 'their' nationals. This can have a legal dimension when a migrant retains the nationality of the country of origin, which usually extends also to the next generations. Sometimes this involvement may have a political dimension, for instance when migrants still have voting rights in their country of origin where politicians might want these votes. This happened during the Turkish elections in 2019, when President Erdogan campaigned in Europe to secure the vote of people of Turkish origin who, due to their Turkish nationality, still retained the right to vote in Turkey.

Not all migrants who settled in their new country are pleased with this kind of attention from their countries of origin, especially not when they are the second or third generation and no longer have much of a connection with their country of origin. The new home country of these migrants may also feel uneasy or even threatened by the scrutiny its nationals receive from their country of origin.

Double nationality

Certain states hold that their nationals retain the nationality of the state, even if they have become the nationals of other countries. The nationality law of such state of origin often dictates that the nationality is passed on to the children, so that the next generations of migrants retain the nationality from their country of origin. In such cases, the men can remain eligible for military service in the country of origin. People with such nationality can usually do little about it: it is not the person but the state that can retract a nationality. So while the new home country may prohibit double nationality (that is: nationality of the new country as well as the country of origin), this prohibition cannot be enforced in these instances unless the country of origin retracts the nationality, which is very rare.

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CHAPTER 6

Democracy and good governance

Up until the 1940s, it was still a matter of debate what constitutes the best form of government: communism, fascism, democracy or some type of autocratic rule. This debate was literally fought out in Europe but was also very pertinent in the colonized lands across the world for whom independence was impending. After 1945, a lot of states opted for a democratic state model, but its opposite – some type of autocratic rule – was also very popular around the world, especially from the 1960s onward. One of the reasons for the wide spread of autocratic regimes is that the great powers of the time – the United States and the Soviet-Union – allowed it, preferring a controllable dictator over an unpredictable democracy. In the famous words of an American president about a South American dictator: “He may be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch.”* As long as rulers made a clear choice for one side or the other in the Cold War, they could get away with almost anything.

The popularity of democracy

This changed in the 1990s with the implosion of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the Cold War. From that moment onwards, democracy was promoted worldwide as the best form of government. To some this was for reasons of idealism, to others the reasons were more pragmatic (‘democracies don’t wage war’ was an often used maxim), and yet others thought democracies would be the best way to promote international cooperation and prosperity.

Why democracy?

“Democracies, after all, are more likely to be stable, less likely to wage war. They strengthen civil society. They can provide people with the economic and political opportunities to build their futures in their own homes, not to flee their borders. Our efforts to help build more democracies will make us all more secure, more prosperous, and more successful as we try to make this era of terrific change our friend and not our enemy.”

(President Bill Clinton’s address to the UN General Assembly, 1994)

The popularity of democracy from the 1990s onwards was shown by the widespread demonstrations of that time calling for democracy. Let’s make a quick tour to get a

* Franklin D. Roosevelt about Nicaraguan president Somoza, in 1939.

feel for the unprecedented extend of these demonstrations. It started in 1989 with revolts in several countries that until then had been satellite states of the Soviet Union: Poland, the Baltic states Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania. In all these countries the mass demonstrations and civil resistance led to a non-violent overthrow of the regimes (except for Romania where the Romanian dictator, Ceausescu and his wife were tried and executed on live television). In the same year of 1989, on the other side of the world, similar demonstrations were taking place in Mongolia and China. Elsewhere in the world, in the years of 1989 and 1990, several African and Central and South American countries also made the shift to a more democratic state system.

These changes of governance did not always go smoothly, but they did create a world-wide sense of optimism and consequently were a source of concern for dictators still in power. After a decade of silence, a new round of mass demonstrations against dictatorial regimes became world news, this time with poetic names: the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange revolution in the Ukraine in 2004, and the Tulip revolution in Kirgizia in 2005. All these revolts led to a non-violent overthrow of the sitting regimes. And after the 2009 mass demonstrations in Iran in support of a liberal candidate for the presidency, a series of uprisings happened in 2011 that became known as the Arab Spring, toppling the long sitting regimes of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen. (Similar demonstrations in Bahrein and Syria were oppressed.)

There was again a lull until 2019, when the world witnessed a new series of non-violent mass demonstrations, mostly driven by young people, and this time all over the world: the most famous and lengthy one was in Hong Kong, but protracted mass demonstrations also took place in Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco and Sudan in the Middle East, Bolivia and Chile in South America, and Catalonia in Europe.

Revolt or revolution?

Many of the mass demonstration since the 1990s were referred to as 'revolution.' However, in most cases the aim of these demonstrations and uprisings was to topple the regime, not to replace the entire political system. The apt term would then be 'revolt', that is a popular uprising against those in power. Complete overturns of political systems ('revolutions') are rare, the main examples being the revolutions in America (1775), France (1789), Russia (1917), China (1949), Iran (1979).

The globalization of mass protests

All these protests were national, that is: they took place within a single country and mostly called for fairer and more democratic governance. But thanks to the advanced possibilities of social media, the protesters of the 2010s were keenly aware

of each other. They were not only watching each other, they were also learning from each other, inspiring each other, using each other's techniques, as well as slogans and symbols. The Spanish slogan *No Paseran* ('They shall not pass!') was not only spraypainted on the walls in Catalonia and Chile, but also in Hong Kong and Iraq. The defiant gesture of raising one's hands to indicate peaceful intent when facing the police during demonstrations was copied from the Black Lives Matter protests in America. And the conscientious act of cleaning up after the demonstrations could be observed from Hong Kong to Lebanon.

Regardless of these global connections and inspirations, the protests mentioned so far had distinctly national aims. This was different for other types of protest movements that were global in both their aims and character. It is perhaps not surprising that the most prominent of them emerged in the same period of 2018 and 2019: #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion, and Fridays for Future. These protests took place on social media as much as they did on the streets and were of a regional and global rather than national level. The reason for the global scope is that these movements addressed issues that are relevant for people all over the world: climate change, power and violence based on gender and race.

The building blocks of democracy

It's one thing to demonstrate for democracy, it's quite another to know what democracy entails. This is not the place to elaborate the political history and philosophy of democracy, but a brief explanation of recent developments is needed to understand the global complexities of today. Four elements jump out: sovereignty of the people, elections, civil society and good governance.

Sovereignty of the people

Most demonstrations against governments today are not meant to turn political systems into democracies (because most of these countries are formally already democracies) but protest the ways in which these political systems have become corrupted and abused. The demonstrators claim a democratic right, namely that they are entitled to have a say in the governance of their country. This right is embedded in the radical political changes that have taken place since the late nineteenth century, whereby most countries became republics and most kingdoms submitted themselves to some kind of constitutional and parliamentary control. Moreover, almost all countries have enshrined rights and freedoms of their people in their constitutions. That means that, at least on paper, almost every state in the world adheres to the precept of governance by the people, for the people and of the people. And while reality can be quite different, this clearly did not deter millions

of people worldwide to take to the streets to claim a restoration of their sovereignty in matters of state.

Sovereignty of the people

Of the 193 member states in the United Nations, 159 states call themselves 'republic', 17 call themselves 'kingdom' and the other 17 states use names like emirates, sultanates, states, principedoms, duchy. Only 9 countries use 'democratic' in their official name, although most of these are not deemed democratic in practice.

(These figures date from 2024 and are subject to change as states regularly change their official name)

Elections

One way to give expression to the sovereignty of the people are elections. In the 1990s, the world witnessed a whole series of first-time national elections in countries all over the world. Western countries as well as the United Nations and the European Union aided these elections by convincing governments to hold them, by providing practical and financial assistance with the logistics, and by sending election observers to monitor them. However, elections were not sufficient to buttress democratic governments. First, because many an autocratic regime managed to either rig the elections or implement election laws that prevented full participation. The resulting election victory allowed them to claim that they were elected as the leader of a functioning democracy even though everyone knew that the reality was different. The other problem was that elections do not make a democracy. A democracy is a system of checks and balances that gives the majority vote the right to govern during a given period of time while maintaining the rule of law that guarantees certain rights and freedoms for everyone. Autocratic regimes, after winning the electoral vote, used their democratic mandate to rule as they wished.

Civil society

Another approach undertaken in the 1990s to enhance democracy, was the notion of civil society. It was argued that a democracy can only function if government maintains a continuous conversation with the population. For this to function, it was considered best if people are organized in parties, unions, societies, organizations, churches, communities, clubs. These organizations generate discussions among the population that, in turn, can fuel the decision-making processes of governmental institutions of the state. In addition to elections whereby the population has the opportunity every so many years to express its political preferences, civil society is a means to stay in continuous dialogue with the government.

The concept of civil democracy provided a new approach to states and governance: rather than the top-down approach of governments telling people what to do, civil

society is the bottom-up approach that ideally gives people more sovereignty in governance. In the 1990s, it was argued that most dictatorial regimes lacked a functioning civil society, either because the state had become the guiding power, as was the case in most communist and socialist countries, or because dictators had assumed all power. Even if they were overthrown and replaced by a democratic system, so the argument went, such a democracy could not function without a thriving civil society. The advocates of civil society saw their reasoning justified in the collapse of so many countries after their regimes had been overthrown: the social movements that had achieved the downfall of their regimes did not have the organization to install and uphold a democracy, and the society of these countries clearly lacked the infrastructure for supporting a democracy. To make sure that newly installed democracies are successful, the reasoning went, a civil society must be formed prior to the downfall of a regime.

It was mostly Western societies that adhered to this view, and from the 1990s onwards they started to invest in civil-society-building in countries that were considered undemocratic. While civil-society-partners on the ground often welcomed this support, the regimes saw it as foreign intervention meant to undermine the state. The countermeasures – penalizing the acceptance of foreign funds or the cooperation with foreign representatives – were usually effective in thwarting the efforts to build civil society in these countries. But even if the civil society efforts were successful, the bottom-up approach of civil society only rarely managed to permeate into the echelons of the state structure.

Democracy-building: Germany and Japan versus Iraq and Afghanistan

After the Second World War, the United States was instrumental in reshaping Japan and Germany into functioning democracies. Similar efforts in Afghanistan (2001-2004) and Iraq (2003-2004) failed completely, however. Scholars are still trying to understand the reasons why:

“The sharp ethnic and religious differences that divide the Iraqi and Afghani peoples are key impediments to the success of the current efforts to develop and sustain fully democratic political institution.” (Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig Source, ‘Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2008).

“Among other things, it is the level of forethought and preparedness and levelheadedness revealed by the administrator-training program in 1943 that made the nation-building and democratization experiments in Japan and Germany after 1945 so successful. And it is, I fear, the level of unpreparedness and muddleheadedness that (...) puts at great risk the experiments with nation-building and democratization in Iraq and Afghanistan.” (Stanley Nide Katz, ‘Democratic Constitutionalism after Military Occupation: Reflections on the United States’ Experience in Japan, Germany, Afghanistan, and Iraq’, *Common Knowledge*, 2006)

Chinese warning against democracy and civil society

In 2013, the Chinese government issued an official 'Communique No.9' in which it warned against the following "false ideological trends, positions, and activities":

1. Promoting Western Constitutional Democracy:
2. Promoting "universal values"
3. Promoting civil society
4. Promoting Neoliberalism
5. Promoting the West's idea of journalism
6. Promoting historical nihilism
7. Questioning Reform and Opening and the socialist nature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

(Excerpt from Communiqué No.9 (22 april 2013) by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China)

Good governance

The unsuccessful results of the civil-society approach of the 1990s and later, led to new views on what is essential in a democracy. For instance, could it be that 'state society' was neglected too much by overemphasizing 'civil society'? In other words, maybe the most effective way of transforming a state into a democracy would be top-down rather than bottom-up. This is when the concept of 'good governance' was introduced. Good governance takes a broad view on governance, which should not be limited to political governance, but also include social and economic wellbeing. Because of its broad meaning, there are many definitions that emphasize one or the other aspect of what good governance should be.

Looking back, it is surprising that these two concepts, good governance and civil society, were not discussed in conjunction, as they are complementary. But for a long time they led separate lives, being promoted by separate actors and agencies. Civil society was the domain of policy makers active in politics, while good governance was the domain of policymakers active in development work, and these two domains hardly interacted. Nowadays, the combination of both concepts is considered important to human wellbeing in general, as will be discussed in the chapter 'Sustainable Development'.

While the notion of good governance may receive international approval, it was mostly promoted by Western countries. This had a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, it reinforced the image and position of the state, allowing dictatorial types to stay in power in exchange for promises to improve their governance. On the other hand, the dictates made by Western countries in exchange for money would

contribute to the increasing rift between what would become known as the global North and global South.

‘Good governance’

The most cited definition has come from the United Nations which explains good governance on the basis of eight characteristics: it should be participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and in accordance with the rule of law.

World Bank

The notion of ‘good governance’ was the brainchild of international donor agencies, particularly the World Bank. Between 2002-2007, the World Bank loaned US\$ 23 billion for projects related to good governance.

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Human rights

Agreements on prosperity or on peace are of all ages and therefore constitute a global structure. International agreements on values, on the other hand, are relatively new and represent a global trend. This is particularly the case with human rights, that received global acceptance in the second half of the 20th century and then gained global traction in the 1990s. However, this did not mean that human rights were embraced everywhere. On the contrary, many countries were quite reluctant to do so. Nevertheless, human rights became a global trend because it was a discourse almost all countries felt they needed to relate to, whether wholeheartedly or not.

Agreeing on international values: freedom and human rights

A quick scan of international agreements about values shows that they are usually about justice, freedom, human rights and equality (peace is also often mentioned, but that is not a value but a state of affairs.) One of the key characteristics of these values is that they usually lack clear definitions. They are easy to use, they can evoke strong emotions and they can make people take to the streets and start revolutions, but it is very difficult to provide accurate descriptions of them. People are willing to fight for justice, for example, but when asked what exactly they mean by that, the answer will be either vague ('no oppression') or short-term ('this government must go').

One of the values that people (and states) have managed to make tangible, is **freedom**. We distinguish between two types of freedom. One is the freedom to be allowed to do something, like voicing an opinion or professing to a religion. The other freedom is the freedom not to have to suffer from certain things, like censorship, oppression, torture or poverty. In the English language these two types are known as the freedom *of* something, and the freedom *from* something. More so than the notion of justice, these ideas about freedom could be translated into workable concepts. By the second half of the 20th century, they became the centerpiece of one of the most influential value systems of our times: human rights.

The origins of human rights are debated. Muslims and Christians claim that the fundamental rights of men are already present in their holy scriptures, the Chinese and the Africans say the same about their ancient civilizations, and the Americans and the French will argue that they were the first to write it down in constitutions. The human rights discussed here are those enshrined in international agreements that were endorsed by most states. The first of these agreements was not a treaty but the (non-binding) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This declaration was later criticized for being drafted by mostly Western countries at a time when

three quarters of the other states had yet to gain their independence. However, the binding human rights treaties were drafted much later and also included the input of many other states.

The human rights of these treaties are organized in legal terms in which two important elements stand out. First, human rights are freedoms that people – individuals or communities – can invoke against their state. Second, human rights are divided into two types. **Classical (or political) rights** are freedoms in which the state should not interfere: the government should not dictate what religion should be, what ideas should be allowed and what ideas shouldn't, and what organizations should be allowed and which shouldn't. **Social rights**, on the other hand, are freedoms that should be actively enabled and guaranteed by the state, like education, housing, nutrition. In other words, these two sets of freedoms demand opposite roles of the state: classical freedoms require the state to stand back, social freedoms to step in.

Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities (HDR), 1998

This non-binding declaration was drafted by experts, philosophers, artists and Nobel laureates in response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. For these human rights to not only be recognized but also implemented, the drafters of the HDR argued, there must be a duty and responsibility on all people and authorities to do so.

The global trend of human rights

Even though the main human rights treaties were active since the 1960s, human rights only became a global trend from the 1990s onwards. At the 1993 United Nations Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, governments from almost all states in the world voted to reaffirm the universality of human rights and there was a proliferation of international non-state actors whose goal it was to promote human rights. In most Western states, human rights became an important part of their national and foreign policy, and large sums were spent on the promotion and endorsement of human rights in the world.

By the late 1990s however, the momentum of this global push for human rights started to falter. Several factors played a role. One was that human rights were championed primarily by Western states. They made it a condition for trade or other cooperation agreements with states that had a bad human rights track record. Human rights standards had to be met for such agreements to be implemented. This conditionality may have served the world-wide endorsement of human rights, but the targeted states did not look favorably upon this method, partly because some of

these states were ruled by dictators who were violating human rights and were not willing to change their ways, and partly because it was reminiscent of colonial times with these same Western nations acting like the colonial powers they used to be, imposing 'civilizational' dictates.

Another aspect that complicated human rights policies was terrorism. In the 1990s, several countries in the Middle East and Asia were suffering from terrorist attacks within their own societies. The response of the states to these attacks was often met with criticism from Western countries for being a violation of human rights. However, when the United States suffered the 9/11 attacks of 2001 and declared the 'war on terror', many of its antiterrorism measures were not unlike those they had criticized in other countries like military courts, incarceration without trial, 'enhanced' interrogation and extended powers for police and secret service agencies. A similar change in attitude emerged in Europe after the terrorist attacks that took place between 2004 and 2015.

The human rights trend also slowed due to debates about its purpose. While human rights and democracy were seen as the ideal path to peace and development everywhere in the early 1990s, this view faced growing criticism. The premise of the human rights agenda is that a society which respects and promotes individual freedoms is more likely to enjoy economic growth than one in which collective or state rights supercede civil or political freedom. The counter argument was that there is little use endorsing human rights if basic social and economic living conditions are not addressed first. The question then was whether economic and social rights (as enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) should take prevalence over human rights, or vice versa. This principled discussion turned into a stalemate between Western countries on the one hand, and most of the other countries in the world on the other hand. In the meantime, several states, especially in East and Southeast Asia, made significant economic progress without meeting international human rights standards, thereby negating the premise that human rights are conditional to economic prosperity.

As the human rights agenda of the 1990s gradually became dormant in the 2010s, it was usurped by the new global concept of 'human security' which will be discussed in more detail in the Chapter 'Security'.

Has the global situation of human rights improved since the 1990s?

This question is hard to answer, mainly because it is difficult to qualify the 'improvement' of human rights. A perusal of international human rights reports suggests that the upholding of political and civil rights have been in decline since the 1990s. Women's rights had seen a steady improvement since the 1970s, but progress appears to be slowing down since the 2010s.

Criticisms

Even though human rights may have lost their high status on the international political agenda, there is still a consensus among all states on the need for and importance of human rights. However, different views have emerged regarding the interpretation of human rights.

The first form of criticism has to do with the premise that each **individual** human being is entitled to human rights. Especially countries in Asia and Africa consider this a typical Western approach. They argue that in their societies it is not the individual, but the **community** that has prevalence. The individual has rights, they argue, but these do not always trump those of the family, the village, the clan or the nation at large. These countries do furthermore believe that the individual approach to human rights as we know today, does not entirely fit the needs and principles of these societies.

The second criticism challenges the notion of **universality of human rights**. It argues that the human rights as framed in most of the early treaties are essentially Western constructs that deny other perspectives. This criticism is known as **cultural relativism**, which claims that values should always be seen and weighed in their cultural context. In the 1990s, 'Socialist', 'Islamic' and 'African' human rights emerged as alternative views. It can be argued that these discussions were also very political, pitting the 'global South' against the 'global North'.

The third type of criticism is the accusation that Western countries maintain **double standards** in upholding international human rights law. This criticism peaked in 2023-2025 with the war and ensuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court considered the Israeli response to a large-scale Hamas attack in violation of international humanitarian and human rights regulations. The fact that many Western states were unwilling to uphold these charges against Israel was considered by other states to be typical of Western double standards when applying human rights law. This situation would fuel the already growing disgruntlement of the global South vis-à-vis the global North.

Human rights and state sovereignty: the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials (1946-1948)

State sovereignty dictates that people are only accountable to their national laws. According to this legal logic, the leaders and military of Japan and Germany during the Second World War could not be held accountable for crimes as long as their actions were lawful under their own laws. The international criminal tribunals of Nuremberg and Tokyo broke with this legal principle: human rights – in this case framed as 'crimes against humanity' – could override state sovereignty.

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