

The evolution of political systems : the effects of globalization

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Abstract:

From a systemic point of view, the evolution of political systems is the result of their interactions with their environment. Transforming it, globalization changes their conditions of functioning : they must face new demands and constraints, with limited resources, while their powers are questioned by supranational regulations and regional autonomies, and economic and financial actors widely escape their intervention ability. Hence quick evolutions, much more adaptative and defensive than scheduled, concerning the structure of systems, but also, perhaps, at the end, the nature of political regimes : if it remains the hope of those suffering a dictatorship, democracy deceives when it proves to be impotent to face the problems generated by globalization.

Résumé :

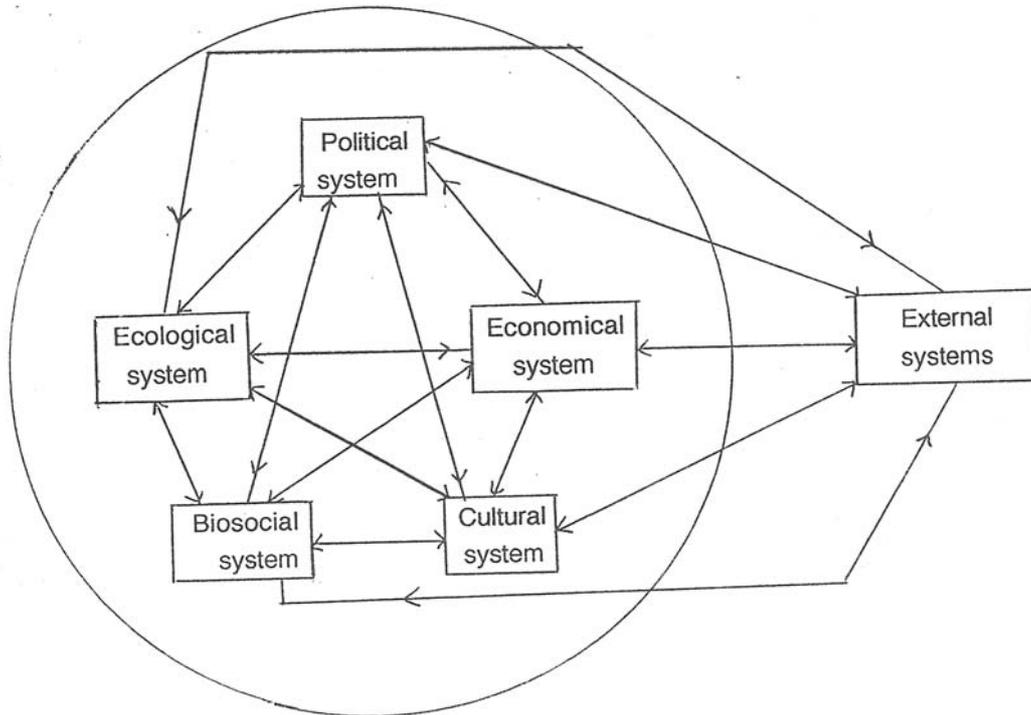
D'un point de vue systémique, l'évolution des systèmes politiques est le produit de leurs interactions avec leur environnement. En le transformant, la mondialisation modifie leurs conditions de fonctionnement : ils doivent faire face à des demandes et à des contraintes nouvelles, avec des ressources restreintes, tandis que leurs compétences sont remises en cause par les régulations supranationales et les autonomies régionales, et que les acteurs économiques et financiers échappent largement à leur capacité d'intervention. D'où des évolutions rapides, beaucoup plus adaptatives et défensives que programmées, concernant la structure des systèmes, mais aussi peut-être, à terme, la nature des régimes politiques : si elle demeure l'espérance de ceux qui souffrent de la dictature, la démocratie déçoit lorsqu'elle se révèle impuissante devant les problèmes engendrés par la mondialisation.

How are evolving political systems ? At the same time, like the other systems, and following their own modes... If it was to be dealt with in any time and any place, the subject would be exceedingly wide ! That's why, after a quick presentation of the general rules of the political systems evolution, I'll limit myself here to the globalization effects on the contemporary political systems, before to point out, equally briefly, some consequences of globalization on political regimes evolution, particularly on democracy.

I - The evolution of political systems

Generally speaking, it may be maintained that for the systemic approach, the political systems evolution, like of all opened systems, is a product of their interactions with their environment.

In a more precise way, that environment may be decomposed, following Jean-William Lapierre, in "*L'Analyse des systèmes politiques*", in various social systems, internal and external to the considered society (see diagram) : the ecological, biosocial, economical, political, cultural and external systems, each being equally able to be decomposed in different sub-systems, and interacting with all the others, up to variable points and modalities : there is no a priori dominating system, neither ultimate instances, which doesn't mean that in such or such particular circumstance, there is no domination of one system on the others.



Nation-state in globalization

This one will be noticed by the strong constraints it imposes, and looking for the most important elements of strength, prestige and power in social stratification of the considered society : for instance, the predominance of the religious hierarchies will tend to indicate the domination of the cultural system, of wealth, of the economical system...

The political system is a set of decision processes concerning the totality of the global society : it's a decisional system, working in conditions of important uncertainty, and not a programmed system ; it is also a regulating system, the one coordinating the interactions of all the other social systems.

Its interactions with its environment push it to evolve, because

- the evolution of the other internal and external systems condition its own one
- the complexity of the feedback networks and their interactions can't be perfectly controlled, and the difficulty increases with time. The political system outputs, its own action on the other social systems, produce positive feedbacks, that change, necessarily, its inputs : the immediate results and the longer term repercussions of its interventions push it to adapt its decisions in consequence.

Some political decisions are directly concerning the functioning of the system and of its organization themselves : what David Easton calls "intrasystem" outputs. The retroaction loops engaged allow the autonomous dynamic of the system. They make use, like its other decisions, of its memory, its capacity of awareness, of analysis, of "computation", to get back an Edgar Morin's expression... capacity of which mobilization in one way or the other depend on the political actors taking part in the system, or excluded by the social stratification existing in the considered society...

Such evolutions may be slow or progressive, take place suavely, or be relatively quick and brutal, concern limited or fundamental elements of the political system : we'll distinguish, so, the adaptative processes of "reformist" regulations, not changing deeply the regime - or, organization mode of the political system -, of the "revolutionary" processes, carrying a change of the regime, often accompanied by a transformation, at least partial, of the intervention mode of the political system on the other social systems, and of all its internal and external relations.

The regime, - which can take very various forms of dictatorship, democracy, monarchy, aristocracy... - is the mode of organization of the system. Conceptually, if it depends on the evolution of the system, and of its relations with the other systems, it must not be confused with the system.

2 - The effects of globalization on political systems

Globalization has the effect to increase economical, political, social and cultural interactions between the nation-states, and to reduce their autonomy : the pressure of the external systems increases. The evolutions will be less "self produced", and more function of external evolutions, on the content level, as well as in the calendar...

We can observe from about twenty years the transformation of the content of political discourses, in most countries : most are henceforth referring to the globalization and its effects, and positioning themselves in favour or against it or some of its aspects. Even in countries taking most advantage of it, it is felt as a constraint. The politicians speak about to protect from its effects, and to adapt people to its requirements, to take benefit of it, and not to be victim. A large part of political parties just refer to it, in one way or another : unemployment, restructuring of enterprises, immigration, and the linked problems, are directly connected to it, though much less stronger than is generally supposed : it creates, in a country such as France, more jobs than it destroys. But the fears it feeds are probably at the origin of the rise of the extremes in the last elections...

But the politician's impotency not being produced by themselves, but linked to the external context of globalization, it is doubtful that the solutions offered by the right or left extremes may have the slightest efficiency : the autarchic withdrawal is not possible any more, because it would be paid with an economical and technological enormous delay... and not be admitted by the economical dominating powers.

The feeling of a relative impotency of the political authorities is not less based for that, because their possibilities to act are less and less reduced by the evolution of the inputs :

A/ The *resources* of the system are all what can contribute to its variety and its possibility to act.

In fact, the economical resources available are reducing :

. The resort to taxes is limited, to favour the employment and competitiveness of enterprises, keep management, avoid the escape to fiscal paradises of particulars and enterprises, and relocations

. The traditional tools of the economical policy are no more available, or less efficient : for instance, in a country like France, with a widely open economy, Keynesian policies to boost the economy by demand have a limited impact, because its growth goes now mainly to imported goods. It's the same with monetary policies : with the "snake"¹, then the only money, inflation and devaluation have disappeared from the arsenal the European government could dispose of. They remain useful, with increased drawbacks, in other countries. Remains only the possibility to control, prices, taxes, salaries, social minima and deductions, as long as the social partners accept it. Hence the political debates around stakes like retirement or social security : it is only spoken of what it's still possible to act on...

The *cultural resources* - which were bringing to the authorities as such a "diffuse"² support - are equally diminishing : such is the case

- . of religions (respect and moral values)
- . of the authority of the family, and particularly, of the father
- . of the reference to a common culture, by the presence of communities where the law is not admitted nor practiced (excision, polygamy, rejection of foreign policies of the state linked to communities membership, etc...)
- . of the culture of village proximity, which favored the education of children by all the adults citizens, disappeared to let place to large blocks where the child is left to himself.

¹ The "monetary snake" regulated the fluctuations of the european moneys authorized.

² David Easton's expression.

The globalised mediatic culture is contributing to reduce that support, diffusing, at the same time, consumption models most of the economic systems of the world are not able to satisfy, and violence models.

B/ In fact, globalization pushes up *the demands* addressed to the state, to increase. Actually, the accelerated competition it stimulates leads to the restructuring of enterprises and the permanent recycling of men through unemployment and learning of new technologies. The state must accompany these processes, and, in our developed countries, favour also the citizens' specialization in leading technologies with a strong tenor of grey matter, which implies, on the one hand :

- the multiplication of the aids to employment and continuous training
 - the scholar system modernization and adaptation (to use computers, for instance)
 - the aid to internationalization of elites (learning of language, student exchanges programs, recruitment of foreign elites...)
 - the increase of research programs
- etc.

And, on the other hand, the help to those who can't follow the move, to avoid the "social fracture"³, and the tearing of society : before, the village idiot had a social function and kept the cows. Today, it's not the village idiot, but a large part of the population, who can't follow a too quick evolution, because jobs with a low qualification have become insufficiently numerous, or inaccessible : it is henceforth necessary to speak English and pass an exam to be lavatory attendant in the French stations ! To introduce a minimum income⁴ is a betterment, but it can't be a solution to structural problems created by the economical evolution, and an amelioration of the functioning structures could only partially achieve that.

The problem is set in very different terms, at least for the gravity of social consequences, in most of the Third World countries, where political system's resources are insufficient to face the many demands of the other social systems, and are, moreover, often drawn out by debt and corruption. So, in Africa, the scarcity of resources does not allow to satisfy the demands emanating from the biosocial system, to cure the sick with Aids: hence the previsions of a substantial reduction of the population in the next decades.

Many countries are at the stage of Europe in the XIX^o century: the one of massive drift from the land to the towns after the betterment of agriculture productivity, that was translated into unemployment and misery in towns, and emigration to the populating colonies. Today, the industrial employment in the Third World towns is reduced by globalization and the opening of the frontiers to the importations of the industrial giants of developed countries, not interested in low-skilled labour technologies, and increasing considerably the entrance ticket cost... Hence the increasing emigration to developed countries. In the next years must be set in an acute way the problem of hundreds of millions of Chinese people, whom agriculture won't need anymore...

Some countries, with strategic, economical and cultural trumps, have, nevertheless, benefited from globalization, insofar as relocations and capital circulation have created jobs and technology transfers on their own behalf. It seems they have taken advantage of a political system enough strong and structured to impose to the external systems the conditions of their opening, and satisfy the requirements of the economic system development in the globalization context : acting very actively, notably, to promote exportations on the external markets (Chile, South-East Asia...).

C/ Globalization generates a great number of *constraints* for the political systems, that is to say, all that helps to contribute to reduce the variety of the system, and its possibility to act.

It limits, actually, the power of the states.

- on the juridical level, institutions like the World Trade Organization, or the European communities, create international juridical considerable constraints to the power of the states : half of the laws voted at the present time by the French congress would be dedicated to make

³ Jacques Chirac's word.

⁴ like the French RMI

them enter the French law... Other institutions like the international NGO, of Greenpeace style, appeal to the public opinion to put pressure on the states.

- on the economical level, the constraints linked to the liberal globalization, as it is now functioning, weigh sometimes very strongly on almost impotent states :

. the capital speculative moves have been in a large scale responsible for the fall of the Pound in 1992, as of the Asiatic crisis, leaving to the concerned political systems the care to repair as well as could be the damages...

. the structural adjustment plans imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have often completely ignored the social consequences of their practices (closing of hospitals, children's deaths...)

. the international rules, as regards competition, are limiting the possibilities of intervention of the states in favour of national enterprises, as well to export as on their own territory. One third of the CAC 40⁵ enterprises would have fallen, so, into the hands of the foreign retirement funds.

. the neoliberal model has been roughly imposed to the Russian economy, without take care of the absence of corresponding political institutions, administration and culture : hence the economical disaster, and the observed development of mafias, instead of the waited businessmen...

Globalization makes, so, the "inputs" evolution of the political systems difficult to manage : to rising demands and constraints, correspond lowering resources... which is strongly conditioning the still possible outputs...

It appears clearly that powerful and structured political systems are indispensable to position favorably a country in globalization, and to resist to the external pressures.

It appears, equally, that, for the globalization to be viable, and stops to be cause of economical, social and ecological repetitive disasters, it must be accompanied by an international and regional regulation which can only be the fact of the states.

3 - Globalization and political regimes

The regime is the mode of organization of the political system. It depends on the other political systems, and, in particular, in contemporary societies, on economical system, and social stratification. Behind coups and revolutions, generally can be found social groups engaged in a social mobility process, linked to the development of new activities, like the bourgeoisie in the French revolution, for instance.

The intervention of globalization on political regimes proceeds in a different way : it is no more matter of an endogenous process, where the feedback loops working between the different systems of a society lead to an adaptation of the political system by a change of regime, but of external pressures, often brutal, imposing a change of regime to the political system, without a previous endogenous evolution.

Hence an incoherent configuration of the different social systems, formed by ill-matched elements issued from different cultures, of which evolutions are no more synchronized, but as shifted in time...

The XX^o century has been marked by various attempts to use the political system to transform all social systems of a society, from an ideological project, not corresponding to the demands of the systems themselves. The regimes corresponding to these attempts have been dictatorships, whether it was to develop the society with an accelerated rhythm (communism, Iran of the Shah), or to impede such development (red Khmers).

The opening to neoliberal globalization has often been imposed by weapons and dictatorships, like in the case of Chile with the coup of the 11th of September 1973... It is difficult to give to democracies the charge to lead the society to evolve in a way favorable to the neoliberal globalization, without it be an hidden form of dictatorship : the structural adjustment plans can't be without being imposed, and if they are not imposed to the elites, who may find their own interest collaborating, they are imposed by the elites to the poorest. These "democracies" will be, then, limited, incomplete, vitiated, rigged democracies, with an institutional functioning

⁵ The French stock exchange index.

marked, like in Chile, by the omnipresence of "watch dogs" non elected of the regime in all the key points, and of constitutional arrangements making very difficult any evolution⁶... This controlling system, settled down from decades in South America, is now widely used in the rest of the world.

Globalization produces serious economical perturbations in the Third World countries, which have to face foreign competition, to adapt to competition norms working in developed countries in matter of working rules, celebrity, ecology, without be able to find shelter in protectionism like in the sixties, and with limited prospects, since we know that the expansion of our level of development to the rest of the world is not tolerable from an ecological point of view.

The population's deception caused by the part really played by the political powers in front of globalization will be expressed, naturally, more in a democracy than in a dictatorship. That's why economical globalization and occidental interests have made the best of many dictatorships, with the only condition that they renounce to one of the main function of political systems : the defense of the interests of their own society against the external systems. When they are too bloodthirsty and hardly presentable to occidental opinions, attached to Christian values and to the respect of human rights, these dictatorships are replaced by puppet democracies.

But the instrumentation of "democracies" controlled by economical globalization and US interests, the proclamation that a government is "democratic" when it is at their service, represent a betrayal of their own ideal by the westerners, and the discrediting of that ideal helps to legitimate the dictatorships and the movements leaded by the ideologies or religious fanaticism the most "reactionaries" and hostile to modernization, like the *Sendero Luminoso*⁷, or Al Qaïda, the suicidal despair of which makes henceforth plan on all the western world the terrorist threat. The confusion neoliberal globalization/democracy risks to scrapper the democratic ideal. As Boutros Boutros Ghali asserted it many times, it is urgent to democratize globalization and the United Nations, to recover a legitimacy. Europe and France could have there an important part to play in the international scene, if it is not too late...

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⁶ See, in the present Chilean constitution, all what gives to the army the possibility to go on controlling the political decisions (Sarget, 1996).

⁷ in Peru.