

Democratic world government – an outline structure essay



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Introduction - problems and benefits of World Government The idea of world government has not received a good press for many years. It tends to make most of us think of Stalinist dictators and fascist domination of the globe. I wish to argue, though, that there is a viable form of democratic world government which could bring many benefits. A democratic world government that really worked would lead to a major increase in the freedom enjoyed by all people on the planet.

It would also make more equitable the international balance of power which currently so heavily favours the rich developed nations and their citizens at the expense of the much larger numbers of citizens in the underdeveloped world. The billion-dollar question is, though, whether there could be a form of democratic world government which was workable and sustainable, not inefficient and expensive, and above all which was fair? Conventional ideas about world government, which typically picture it in the form of a global parliament passing universal laws in order to create an identikit legal framework for all world citizens, suffer from three severe problems.

Firstly, the near-impossibility of persuading all of the world's countries to hand over their sovereignty to a global government of this sort. Secondly, the risk - of which we are, and must always be, very aware - of permitting a future global dictatorship of a particularly intransigent kind (imagine how difficult it would be to dislodge a Hitler if he was in possession of the kind of absolute power available through such a form of government). And thirdly, as we see sometimes today in the European Community, the tendency of such a large-scale government to create detailed, uniform laws for the entire area it governs; the impetus would be towards a sort of global

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standardisation, almost certainly based in the cultural attitudes of the West, which would massively erode the rich cultural variations which exist in the world.

A preferable system of world government, if such could be invented, would meet all of these objections, as well perhaps as providing a global framework designed to encourage the democratic possibilities of all nations. Perhaps such a system might look something like the one I shall now describe.

New form of World Government - outline structure The new World Parliament would be a single elected chamber, possibly similar in format to the House of Commons in the UK but with places for up to 1000 elected representatives - Members of the World Parliament, or 'MWP's. The MWPs would be elected from national or supra-national constituencies, one per so many head of population (but probably with a minimum of at least one per nation, at least in the early decades [There are approaching 200 nation states in the world at the moment, with populations ranging from 50, 000 - St Lucia - to 5, 000, 000, 000 - China. This represents a variance of a factor of 100, 000, so the disparity in representation could not be tolerated indefinitely. In due course some notion of communal MWPs, shared by small countries of reasonably alike culture, would have to be introduced.

]). They would be subjected to re-election every 5 years. The world government envisaged here would have no army and would require only minimal administrative support. As a result, its costs would be small.

It would not be allowed to raise any taxes, instead being funded in a similar way to that in which the United Nations is today, by contributions from the nation-states which make up its membership.

Such nation-states would continue to exist in the new system just as they do now, forming an essential balancing power to that of the world government, and would be without significant loss of sovereignty. Membership of the new system which the world government represented would be voluntary for each nation in the world, just as membership of the United Nations currently is [Some democratic nations choose not to join the United Nations even today, Switzerland being a prime example.].

Becoming a member would involve them adding their signature to a world treaty, which decision would need to be ratified by the population of the country in a referendum. Only upon so joining the 'club' would a country's people have the right to vote into the world government one or more MWPs, and in turn the world government would only have the right to instigate actions which related to countries within its membership.

Once in the system a country would be able to extricate itself only by majority vote of its population in another referendum. The world government's purpose would be to enact laws by normal majority voting within its chamber, but laws which were couched in general terms. Because presented in general terms, the laws would permit individual countries to retain or create their own culturally-based detailed laws and social practices as long as these did not conflict with the general world-law.

The laws, although couched in general terms, would be very real. A World Court would exist, providing a top-level of appeal for individuals once they had exhausted their domestic forms of justice and where they thought they were innocent under the general world law (much as we in Europe can now make an ultimate appeal to the European court). But what would the powers of the world government be? The new system must not permit the world government to enforce its desires in an absolute way upon the world population because that would immediately raise the twin dangers of global dictatorship and imposed cultural uniformity.

World Government's only power - enforced referenda Instead, nations would be allowed to transgress world-laws - to pass local laws, or otherwise operate, in contradiction to them - but only where the population of that country was in agreement with its government in that course of action. The principal element of the new world constitutional system would be the provision of just such a check that any country which went against a world-law was expressing the will of its people. So the world government's one and only direct power would be that of requiring any nation within its membership to undergo a binding referendum on any issue, and ultimately if necessary a general election, which would be conducted according to a set of internationally agreed standards.

These standards, written into the world treaty, would include the fact that the world government must be given equal opportunity to present its arguments to the country's people as the host government.

So say, for example, that a generalised human rights law had been passed by the World Parliament. At some later point in time a majority of MWPs might come to consider that a particular member country was violating this law, either in its current activities or in a new law which it had enacted locally. Then the world government could require a binding referendum to be held in the offending country, so that the people of that country could have a democratically-valid opportunity to decide whether they wanted their national government to adhere to the world-law on this point.

If the result of the referendum was in the local government's favour then it could continue to operate as it had chosen, and no further action would follow. On the other hand, if the outcome favoured the world government's view then its general law would take precedence in the nation. If in turn that fact was not promptly acted upon, then the world government could enforce a general election. The country's population would thus become the final arbiters of the question.

The effects of this sort of setup are fairly clear.

On issues where most human individuals are likely to be in agreement irrespective of their background, such as on the immorality of torture, the imposed referendum would ensure that governments tending towards dictatorship would be stopped in their tracks. But where a putative world government law was based on cultural prejudices the local population would almost certainly be in agreement with their own government's decision to ignore the global law and would vote in favour of the local decision. In doing so of course they would have effectively taken their nation out of the world

system as regards this one issue, and would therefore have to forego access for themselves to the World Court on the global law in question. Constraint on World Government How would the world government be constrained to only pass laws couched in general terms? Well, if it passed laws which were too detailed they would almost certainly be rejected by many populations supporting their domestic governments in internal referenda.

Concern about high-levels of such refusals would probably in itself be enough to restrain the world government from being too precise on many issues. To buttress this impulse, though, a constitutional mechanism would be built into the world treaty, such that the MWP's themselves would be automatically subjected to a general world election en masse if more than, say, 10-20% of countries rejected a world law in national referenda. But how would a world government which had no military power of its own impose referenda and elections and make them binding? What if a country's government, perhaps tending towards dictatorship, chose simply to ignore the world government's requests for it to hold a referendum on some issue? Enforcement The answer is simple, and maintains the principle that the world government's only direct power should be to enforce referenda. Faced with this sort of threat the world government would be constitutionally allowed to initiate synchronised referenda of the populations in, say, 5 randomly-chosen nations in order to sample world opinion at a statistically-significant level.

It would put before those populations its suggestions as to what co-ordinated sanctions should be used by all countries against the offending nation. The result of the vote would dictate what collective world action could be taken.

The action to be taken might be initially an economic blockade by all member countries, but ultimately if the crisis escalated could become a collective invasion of the offending country. It would be up to the polled populations, acting as a world jury, to decide on behalf of the whole world whether they were going to allow the principles of world government to be upheld by voting for such sanctions, or were going to let the world slip back into its messy and dangerous old ways. In practice the mere threat of the tight, global economic sanctions which could be invoked by this method would in most cases very rapidly bring a recalcitrant member country back into line. But if not such sanctions could quickly be put in place after the sampling referenda. If they in turn proved inadequate and if a sampling world vote upheld military intervention then ultimately an invasion could be carried out.

As the world government itself would have no army, this would be planned and mounted by a collective military force made up of units from all, or a selection of, the armies of each member country of the world - in the same way as the UN Peacekeeping forces are today. (Once again, in many cases the mere planning of such an action would persuade the country to drop its resistance.) If however the sampling votes activated in such a crisis failed to back the world government then at best the world government itself should be subjected to an immediate election, and at worst the entire system of world government would be threatened and might start to unravel. The important point here is that economic and military action would be decided upon by vast numbers of ordinary people, rather than by governments

swayed by all sorts of 'interests' and biases. In a very clear way a responsibility for the future of the world would reside with each of us.

The fact that it would so reside with the people of the world would be a safeguard as ultimate as could ever be achieved against the possibility of a dictator assuming global power through the apparatus of the world government. The dictates of such a despotic world government would doubtless very soon cause it to lose such a sampling referenda, and it would not itself be in possession of any military power on which it could call. The system of global governance, composed of the world government in co-existence with multitudinous nation states, would thus embody a balanced set of powers and checks. Nation states would retain much power, although subject to the general will of the world government. As long as they acted in accordance with the wishes of their citizens they would be able to implement any policies they pleased. They could probably also defy the world government without the backing of their citizens to a small extent with ease, but any larger revolt would be prevented by the need to carry a majority of the population.

If they pursued their defiance they would face the ultimate threat of economic and then military isolation in the world. Or at least, that is how things would be as long as the world government confined itself to passing humane and unbiased laws. It itself would be subject to a strong counter-balance to its powers. If it showed any tendency to err from such a widely accepted moral basis then the continued existence in the world of a large number of varied and independently-willed nation states would guarantee that transgressions of unpopular global laws would commence fairly rapidly.

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Referenda would follow, in which local populations would almost certainly vote against the world government line and thus eventually force its members to face re-election. The world government would in fact only be able to operate by sticking to a very broadly accepted seam of morality.

Indeed it is more than likely that after an initial phase of establishing a basic canon of general world-laws, the main emphasis of the world government would turn to reviewing the practices of nations of the world.

There would of course always be occasional requirements for new general laws, or amendments to existing ones, but much of the work of the mature world government would probably consist in monitoring national conformance with world-law and deciding upon appropriate actions in cases of transgression. Benefits - Reducing militarisation Could the existence of the world government do anything to reduce conventional military tensions in the world? Well, there seems no reason why the world government should not take the view that unsanctioned war between countries should be totally illegal, and pass a law to such an effect. Then if war did break out between any two countries, the standard procedure of global-sampling referenda could be invoked to enforce devastating economic sanctions against both of the warring nations, or to raise a collaborative army with which to overwhelm them and enforce peace. In effect this would be an active version of what is currently the passive UN Peacekeeping Forces.

Furthermore, the world government could impose limits on the size of armies and quantity of weapons any country could be permitted, and then over time

gradually force these down, so producing a world which in the long-run would become stable and virtually military-free.

In the absence of a fool-proof ' Star Wars' system providing a defensive umbrella-shield against inter-continental missiles and planes, a precondition of such action and of the functioning of the world government as a whole, would be some sort of collectivisation of nuclear weapons and any other vastly destructive technology. An individual country in possession of and willing to use nuclear weapons could resist all of the co-ordinated international power at the disposal of the world government unless at least a comparable destructive capacity could be rapidly switched against it as a deterrent. So, as part of signing the world government treaty countries in possession of such technology would have to agree to make a proportion of it available for use in such circumstances. Such weapons might be sited in a neutral, and sparsely-populated territory such as on one of the polar ice-caps, and would remain under the control of the individual owning countries.

However in circumstances in which an individual nuclear power was resisting the world government, and agreement on scales of activity had been defined by a global-sampling referendum, the possibility would exist for such countries through the world government to co- ordinate their use of them in retaliation against a nuclear strike.

No one country need possess a huge number of such weapons as long as the collective total would together outweigh those owned by any individual recalcitrant nation, and as before there would be every reason to hope that the world government could gradually force the levels down to their

minimum throughout the world. Benefits - International ecology Urgent international ecological problems, such as the excessive production of ozone-destroying chemicals and the destruction of rainforests, could also be dealt with by this sort of world government. It could pass laws which acted across countries in mutual ways, backed up ultimately by the possibility of enforcement via the global-sampling system.

For example, the world government might enact a balanced general law which imposed severe limits on rainforest destruction, and also appropriately penalised wealthier economies whose economic activity tends to encourage it. As always such a law could be neutralised by a population for their own country (although I would argue that we would be much more likely to see a positively altruistic response from ordinary people than from their governments, which tend to react to public pressure, rarely to lead it).

But if such a law actively broke down because of high levels of veto, the world government could try to resort to a global-sampling referendum to 'enforce it' using the threat of economic sanctions. Again the 'jury' of randomly-chosen populations would become the conscience of the world in deciding how important the problem was. There could also be an emergency procedure whereby nations affected in a negative way by the policies of their neighbours - a good ecological example of this is provided by the Scandinavian nations, which currently suffer from acid-rain generated largely in the United Kingdom - could request the World Parliament to enforce a combined binding referendum of all of the involved populations on the topic.

There might also be a procedure where a petition signed by 0.

1% of the population of a country could lead to a binding referendum on any issue within that country via the powers of the World Parliament. Democratic assumption It might be argued that such a system of world government, while allowing considerable cultural variation among its member countries, nevertheless makes the assumption that democracy is acceptable and desirable within all cultures. This is true, but there are two mitigating points to be made. Firstly, it should be remembered that membership of the world system would be voluntary, depending on governments responding to public pressure to join it, and in each case would only be deemed to be ratified by a majority vote in a popular referendum. Where democracy was genuinely not acceptable to a culture then there would be no such internal pressure, or membership would fail at the initial referendum stage, and such a country would then voluntarily remain outside the system.

In practice, if people were polled by fair referendum, it seems most unlikely that there would be any cultures, except perhaps the most primitive, which would reject the basic preferability of democracy over dictatorship.

Secondly, the international standards for democratic practice need neither be uniform nor blindly instantiate the common model of Western European or American practice. Individual nations could use any method approved by the standards - and there would almost certainly at the very least be a spectrum of possibilities from the 'one person one vote' method to many types of proportional representation - for both the election of their MWPs and the conduct of internal referenda. There is no reason why forms of fair

practice which arise from other cultural backgrounds should not be incorporated. As long as some fundamental general criteria were met by a procedure for establishing the will of a populace then it could be approved.

The criteria might include such things as freedom of expression without fear of reprisal, and no inequitable influence on the outcome by minority groups [%f: For example, it is not obvious that some procedures used in small tribal communities for arriving at consensus, although secret voting is not involved, are not fair in this fashion]. Indeed it could even be stated in the world constitution that any form of procedure would be acceptable as long as it was approved once by a member nation's population in a referendum carried out using an already approved practice.

It might well be the World Court in which the interpretation of the standards and the arbitration on practices would best ultimately lie. Getting from here to there - Step 1 But isn't this all just a pipe-dream? Could we ever get from where mankind is now to this seemingly ideal situation? Could it be done without force? Funnily enough, it may not be too difficult.

One of the beauties of this system is that it threatens the sovereignty of individual countries only to a minimal degree, making it difficult for them to have grounds for resisting popular pressure to join in. The full system could possibly be achieved in three graduated steps over a period of a number of decades. The process would start with the setting up through the UN of an international organisation of Electoral Observers, rather like the current Electoral Reform Society but on a much larger scale and on a more formal basis. Their aim would be to produce the international set of standards and

procedures for the conduct of democratic referenda and governmental elections, allowing for the many different systems of direct, proportional and other representation which might be used.

These standards would no doubt cover issues such as how to keep votes unattributable to individuals, procedures for fair counting of votes, and safeguards against victimisation of voters.

The job of the UN Electoral Observers would then be to monitor the actual practices of democracy in the world against them. That this is all not an unrealistic scenario is shown by the fact that in 1991 the countries of the Commonwealth gave serious consideration to the development of just such an organisation. No doubt many democratic countries would have no objections to the UN Electoral Observers monitoring and reporting on their practices. Over time they would become a familiar and accepted feature of democratic practice in numerous countries, although clearly there would remain many countries which would continue not to welcome them.

Getting from here to there - Step 2 After some years or decades, once the UN Electoral Observers were well established, a voluntary treaty would be drawn up by the UN to develop the system to a second level.

The treaty would commit signatory countries to make use of the Electoral Observers for all subsequent elections and referenda, and to repeat any which the Observers classed as failing to meet their basic standards of democratic practice. The established, mostly developed democracies would almost certainly, if there was a sufficient groundswell of public opinion in favour of such a strategic move towards underpinning the basic quality of

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democracy, again tend to accept this treaty and operate under its regime. As a result a considerable weight of moral and public pressure would build on other governments in the world to follow suit. Gradually other countries if they had any pretence to democracy would be forced by both internal and external opinion into the fold. It has taken Britain many centuries of the 'democratic-habit' to build up genuinely democratic practices, and such a system of independent international observers with enforceable standards could go a long way to assuring populations, especially those of underdeveloped countries in Africa, South America and Asia, of the viability of proper democracy in their countries.

Getting from here to there - Step 3 It might well take decades before numbers had grown significantly, but eventually there would come a time when a significant percentage of the world's population, living in a considerably wider variety of cultures than the merely European and American, were enjoying governmental systems which operated within the system of democratic safeguards. Finally, at that time, a world government treaty would be drawn up incorporating the full system of global government described earlier, for countries again to sign voluntarily. As an additional 'smoothing in' mechanism, for perhaps the first 50 years of its life the World Parliament might have the existing UN as its 'upper-house' - able to review its laws and at least suggest amendments. It would also probably be sensible for global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to eventually be brought under the control of the world government.

These very significant global powers would then be under a more direct democratic control, and would be more likely to make a fairer spreading of the world's financial resources into the impoverished underdeveloped world. As before there is every chance that there would be enormous popular pressure on most national governments to back this final phase of development and to join the world government system, because people would see that its effect would be to ensure deeper and fuller democracy throughout the world.

Perhaps again the initial core of member-countries at each step would be made up of the mature western democracies, but because of this pressure it would not be long before membership became wider. Conclusion We have all witnessed in recent years the populations of many countries (the Phillipines, China, the USSR, Eastern Europe, etc.) doing their best to bring about local democracy. In some cases this seems to have worked reasonably smoothly (eg. Poland) but in others (the Phillipines) the resulting government has always been balancing on a knife-edge, threatened on all sides by despotic forces; in some cases (China) the population has failed to win through.

One of the major benefits of the full world government system would be that populations would only have to force their governments to sign the voluntary world government treaty, by the sort of courageous popular action we have seen so much of, in order to ensure their country's future democratic health; from this single action all else would safely follow. If their government subsequently started to digress from the democratic path, or was overthrown and replaced by a totalitarian alternative, no doubt it would soon fall foul of some world government laws, and would then leave itself open to <https://assignbuster.com/democratic-world-government-an-outline-structure-essay/>

the full range of sanctions which the world government could persuade other populations to bring against it. A fitting plan for the opening decades of the 21st century? Perhaps. If it worked such a system of world government would almost certainly represent a quantum leap forward in the levels of freedom enjoyed by the poorer citizens of the world, as well as to some extent those of us in the developed nations.