



Academic Paper

# The Prospects of Structural Transformations of Political Systems



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# The Prospects of Structural Transformations of Political Systems

Prof. Dr. Walid 'Abd al-Hay<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The concept of “authority” is one of the oldest concepts of sociology, especially political sociology. It includes various dimensions, where authority is a set of peremptory rules based on which the members of a social or political system have agreed to interact, entrusting their enforcement to whoever they deem appropriate by virtue of power, knowledge, wealth, social position or otherwise. However, the subordination of individuals or societies to authority is motivated either by fear, benefit, or respect of a set of values based on which they seek order and the development of their lives. Notably, it is necessary to distinguish, regarding authority and its forms, between the “position” itself and the incumbent, despite the mutual influence between them.<sup>2</sup>

Futures studies have sought to monitor the mega-trends of authority and its status to determine its future in the long run. In this study, we seek to alert the Arab and Muslim political forces to the transformations taking place in this regard, which will have profound impact on the structure of our societies, and on their ability to adapt to the changes that influence our societies and authorities, especially the political ones, and that would influence, also, the authorities and societies of the allies and opponents. I also believe that it is necessary to pay attention to the difference between mega-trends, events and sub-trends, or trends that may appear temporarily deviated or transient to historical mega-trends but eventually fall within the course of the mega-trend; otherwise, they will constitute a turning point signaling the beginning of a new mega-trend.



## First: The Mega-Trends of Authority

Based on the foregoing, what are the mega-trends of authority development, and what will its form be like in the coming decades?



To answer the above question, it is necessary to monitor the literature of change, regardless of its normative dimension. In this context, we will find the following:

### 1. The Decline of the Authority of Ideology in Favor of the Pragmatic Approach

By this, we mean questioning the weight of contemporary ideologies in determining patterns of political interaction. This literature appears in Zbigniew Brzezinski's Convergence Theory, which links the increasing and accelerating similarity in the infrastructure of most contemporary societies to the gradual and accelerating similarity of their superstructures, including ideologies. This is the same perception put forward by Daniel Bell in his study about the "End of Ideology," where he predicted a model combining the socialist style with capitalism as embodied in the welfare state model. Samuel Huntington supported this trend in his study on the clash of civilizations with the belief that culture replaces ideology, and Mikhail Gorbachev added in his book, "Perestroika," a call for stripping international relations from ideology, a trend reinforced by Heike Holbig's study on the adaptation of ideology in Chinese politics.<sup>3</sup>



If we look at the political authority of religious beliefs, it is necessary first to distinguish between the historical trend and the fluctuating sub-trend, which is evident in the growing role of religion from 1970s until now (Islamic movements, the return of Confucian traditions, the victory of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party in India, liberation theology in Latin America, Aleksandr Dugin's theories on the role of Orthodoxy in Russia, the growing weight of religious parties in Israel, neoconservatives in the US, and the study of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe "*Towards a Beautiful Country: My Vision for Japan*," focusing on returning to the origins and traditions, including religious ethics.<sup>4</sup>

However, looking at the historical mega-trend indicates:<sup>5</sup>

- ▶ a. The increasing tendency to explain various social (poverty, wealth, tyranny, victory, defeat in wars, etc.), and natural phenomena (earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, diseases, etc.) using the scientific method at the expense of metaphysical explanation.

- ▶ b. The number of political systems classified as religious in the strict sense are two (Iran and the Vatican) out of 199 countries, in addition to the gradual decline in the number of countries stipulating that their constitutions include the state religion or the adoption of religion in one way or another in public life, which is illustrated in the following table:<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1: Status of Religion in Contemporary Political Systems**

| Status of religion   | Countries | Distribution   | Percentage compared to the countries of the world |
|--|-----------|--|---|
| <b>The existence of a constitutional provision (or laws) on the state religion</b> | 43        | 27 Muslim countries<br>13 Christian countries<br>2 Buddhist<br>1 Jewish              | 22%   |
| <b>Countries considering the religious dimension without a constitutional text</b> | 40        | 3 Muslim<br>28 Christian<br>4 Buddhist<br>5 varied                                   | 20%   |
| <b>Countries with no official or preferred religion</b>                            | 106       | -  | 53%   |
| <b>Hostile to religion and stipulates for its prohibition</b>                      | 10        | Most of them are left-wing countries (China - Cuba - Vietnam - North Korea ... etc.) | 5%  |

- ▶ c. The number of religious wars historically (less than 6.98%), according to the Encyclopedia of War.<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ d. International laws regulating most aspects of contemporary international life are man-made laws. Some of them, like the Charter of the United Nations, provide for refraining from building relations on religious grounds.<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ e. International trade: Indicators of international political economy show that most trade of religious blocs is external rather than internal, meaning that these religious blocs interact economically and commercially with countries outside their bloc. Also, some blocs have transcended the sectarian differences within the same religion although sectarian disparity has historically been the cause of fierce wars.<sup>9</sup>
- ▶ f. Globally, restrictions on forming religious organizations or teaching religion in schools have increased by 20% from 2007 until now.<sup>10</sup>





## 2. The Decline of the Authority of the Traditional Politician in Favor of the Technocrat

The enormous increase of the technical complexity of life has made the technocrats the real decision-makers, while the politicians do nothing but implement. When the author of these lines studied China and the USSR, he found that Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping reached power when communist technocrats outnumbered traditional ideologues in central decision-making bodies.<sup>11</sup> It seems that Alvin Toffler was right in his perception that the clash between the forces that will employ knowledge and experience and the forces of wealth will be more important than the conflict between socialism and capitalism or between nation states. For using traditional violence in the exercise of power expresses a low-level authoritarian pattern, while using wealth is considered a medium-quality authoritarian pattern. As for the case when using the power of knowledge, it is considered a high-quality authoritarian pattern, because it influences individuals and societies through remote and indirect guidance.<sup>12</sup>



The findings of the study of the American theorist Buckminster Fuller show that the “World Game” he established in Canada in which thousands of scientists and leaders participated to formulate equations to solve the world’s crises indicated that the worst results were those set by politicians, due to their inability to understand complex transformations which need a broader participation of experts to be able to comprehend them.<sup>13</sup>

## 3. The Decline of Party Authority

The rate of participation in political parties is declining globally for the favor of engaging in civil society bodies. Anthony Giddens says that the percentage of membership in civil society organizations in the world is 20 times the number of those involved in parties, and the percentage is increasing.<sup>14</sup> Civil society organizations have taken on the role of parties gradually and quietly, but this is not separate from the decline of ideologies and the rest of the indicators we will address in this regard. Quantitative studies reveal that the decline takes place in the percentage of members in parties, the percentage of participation in party elections, the percentage of election of party

lists, the change of voting trends for parties between election rounds, and the continuous erosion of the social bases of traditional parties. Apparently, the Arab region is among the most declining in this aspect compared to other global political regions.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. The Decline of the Charisma Factor

The charisma that has often dominated the minds of societies as one of the components of political influence is retreating from the charisma of the heart (emotional attachment due to the elements of the charismatic personality) to the charisma of the mind, that is, towards astonishment in front of scientific achievements. With the geometric progression of inventors, it became difficult to count and keep track of them, however, their large numbers



made the political leader lose his charisma. Thus, it is not surprising that charismatic leaders are gradually fading, and the literature on the subject indicates what some researchers confirm about the correlation between the gradual disappearance of the phenomenon of charisma and the growth of rationality and the critical mind less affected by the “charm of the personality and its attractiveness.”<sup>16</sup> The debate about charisma revolves around who makes this phenomenon: Is it the personality traits of the individual leader, or the followers who have a knowledge and value system that correspond to the personality, or is it the situation that allows certain personality traits to emerge? Academic studies indicate that the three dimensions together create the phenomenon of charisma, which requires linking the decline of charisma to the decline of its components.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the validity of the theory of heroism—developed by Thomas Carlyle who tends to explain history on basis of the central role of the heroic individual, the increasing need for political, scientific or economic achievements, requires now more than a hero to accomplish the task, without denying the individual differences among humans.<sup>18</sup>

## 5. The Decline of the Tradition Authority

- ▶ a. Globalization has made the interpretation of phenomena in dire need of a perspective other than the traditional understanding of politicians. The interpretation became dependent on cognitive integration, thus marginalizing the political and ideological monopoly of interpretation. The problem here is that the pace of change is clearly accelerating, in three aspects, namely:



technology, climate change and globalization. However, the pace of adaptation of social, cultural and political structures is much slower than the pace of change, which creates a deep and growing chasm that does not give politicians or ideologies enough opportunity to adapt to it. It is sufficient in this context to reflect on the consequences for the future of the concept of the family if the scope of human cloning expands (especially the intelligent ones), or the phenomenon of surrogacy expands, which will create a disturbance in the concept of genealogy, and even in emotional ties and the concept of traditional social systems, or if we reach the point of the Cyborg.<sup>19</sup>

- ▶ b. The media revolution has made the comparisons between what the readers or spectators see and what they experience, lead to the development of critical minds, especially in the field of political behavior and government administration. For example, the increasing ability of the media to “fake reality,” which is identical to the expression adopted by the Oxford Dictionary “post-truth political debate,” which means that the new media has been able to provide information while using different technical tools so as to reach the desired shaping of the public opinion (for example: hiding the image of bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at the moment of the fall, and publicizing the image of Saddam at the moment of capture... ). International reports have identified the most prominent challenges facing democratic systems due to the acceleration of technological and economic change. For example, the change of the logistic curve of technology reveals the poor distribution of income in the 25 industrialized countries. During the period following the economic crisis in 2008 to present, in the US, “the incomes of the top 1% grew by more than 31%, compared with less than 0.5% for the remaining 99% of the population,” which creates social crises and triggers questions about the capitalist model and its value system.<sup>20</sup>





- ➔ From another angle, technology will affect many aspects, which are directly or indirectly related to authority:<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ a. The end of privacy: In the next five years, there will be about 25 billion devices that monitor individuals' devices and their flowing information.
  - ▶ b. Predictive policing, which means the ability of security services to predict crime before it occurs.
  - ▶ c. Automation: Machines will replace humans by 35% in Britain, 77% in China while currently 6% of jobs are automated in the US every ten years.

## Second: Repercussions of Mega-Trends

The trends we mentioned have left a series of repercussions on several aspects, as follows:

### 1. Political Authority

An increasing global trend towards the following:

- ▶ a. The election of a ruler: The election of the ruler represents a gradual change towards not accepting the absolute and eternal ruler. Rather, the formal inclusion of this procedure (as in the Arab world) was due to the pressure of mega-trends, which will continue. There is another dimension this issue reveals which is that between 1950 and 2020, 76 monarchs around the world were deposed.<sup>22</sup>



- ▶ b. The reduction of the ruler term: In most countries, the terms of presidents are almost limited to five years, and there are few countries that allow a less or little more. Also, most countries are now limiting the number of times a person is allowed to assume presidential power to two times.<sup>23</sup>

➡ The indicators available in this aspect show the following:<sup>24</sup>

- ▶ a. The time-limit on the term of the president:
  - The term of office of the president has become between 4-5 years in 103 countries compared to 10 countries for a term of six years and 10 countries for a term of seven years.
  - As for the number of times for assuming power (in theory or in practice), 103 countries specified two times, one country once, and three countries three times. The rest of the countries did not specify the number of times.
  - There are 45 countries where the term of office is not specified (the number of times for renewal has been deleted for the Chinese president).

If we take Africa as an illustrative example, we will find that between 1945 and 1990 there were only six African countries that set the term of office for the president. However, by 2010, the number became 49 countries (out of 54 African countries) that set the term at two times, while Seychelles set it at three times.

- ▶ b. The increasing number of parties participating in power reduces the role of the president, and the increasing complexity and intertwining between different fields complicates the ability to understand different phenomena, which makes the president in need of many experts. Thus, the scope of those participating in decision-making has expanded, as most of the alternatives are set by the technocrats, and the president chooses between them. This means that the technocrat is the one who prepares the local environment for decision-making.
- ▶ c. Declining power of the official media in favor of a new media sector produced by the information revolution and the Internet, which fired a bullet of mercy at the majestic image of the leader, or the authority of the tribal sheikh, the master, or all forms of social rituals, etc. Rather, these new means destroyed the majestic image of the leader where it is sufficient to mention the display of pictures of the ouster of Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Hosni Mubarak, Nicolae Ceausescu, Evo Morales, etc.

## 2. The Social Authority

As for the authority of language, it seems that attention to grammar tends to be less important than the semantics of the term (Futures studies scholars tell us that 55% of current English is not understood by Shakespeare at all).<sup>25</sup> Adherence to grammar no longer has that sway, and the reader is no longer interested in grammar, as it is sufficient for him to understand the intended idea. This is what we absolutely notice in the Arabic language, where there is a rebellion against the rules of traditional poetry and rhyme,



etc. This is something we find in the English language and elsewhere, and all of this involves a degree of rebellion against the authority of language.<sup>26</sup>

In the field of customs and traditions, an academic study issued by Stanford University<sup>27</sup> has tackled the relationship between the developments of “fashion” and the political values and structure, in different historical and contemporary stages. The study wonders why the clothing styles that are less “submissive” to the orders of social authority are increasing (see for example ripped pants, or the transformation of some shirts into billboards on the chest and abdomen), as this is not an “immoral act as many see it,” but rather a “collective unconsciousness that silently revolts, where the decisions against the rules of behavior are individually made. Perhaps the idea of fashion is in essence a rebellion against a “peremptory dress code.”



➡ The above leads to two conclusions:

- ▶ a. Political values (freedom, equality or justice) do not appear only in electoral behavior, demonstrations or political violence. Rather, it is necessary to read beyond the transformations in architecture, fashion, arts, literature, etc., to infer future political trends.
- ▶ b. Reconstructing hierarchies of tribes, gender, color, religion, language, etc. The restructuring of the social hierarchy will have repercussions that will lead to the weakening of the traditional political center.

### 3. The Economic Authority

If we ask about the impact of the multiplicity of commodity forms that serve one purpose on the concept of “implicit authority,” then pencils, Bic pens or liquid ballpoint pens have retreated in favor of countless forms in their colors and shapes and even ways of using them. The pen may even be on its way to extinction with the increase of use of computers as the number of times the pen is used has become less. What is true



for the pen can be applied to all commodities, markets, currencies and the interrelationship between the local economy and the globalized economy. Thus, is the American company in China part of the American economy or the Chinese economy? General Motors (GM) changed its slogan “What is good for America is good for GM” to “What is good for GM isn’t necessarily good for America.”

### Third: Summary of the Position on Authority

I know that the issue of authority in its political, social and economic sense raises many observations. This calls for looking at the issue from two angles:

- ▶ 1. Historical and not immediate trends, which means the analysis of phenomena through the mega-trend and linking events and sub-trends to that.
- ▶ 2. Paying attention to the increasing rate of symmetry of the political, economic and social systems of different societies. Consequently, the historical differences on which authority—in its various forms—has built its power are changing, paving the way for a new authority that is less hegemonic, on the one hand, and more participatory and less linked to geography or to the immediate social environment, on the other hand. This is what our political, social and economic systems seem to be insufficiently aware of.

Let us dissociate from the current reality, and look at historical trends to realize the silent rebellion that will turn into a declared one later. It is not permissible to separate political, social, economic and scientific rebellions from globalization with its scientific and secular essence, due to the massive intertwining among the different structures of all societies. Accordingly, the subconscious hidden in the social and political structures is the driver that futures studies must place at the center when monitoring trends, rather than being merely preoccupied with immediate events or sub-trends.

It is known that futures studies are concerned with change; accordingly, the status of authority becomes linked to changes and their impact on: peremptory rules; influence; the importance of the position or the person occupying it; and the extent to which the existing knowledge is compatible with the lived reality. This means the necessity of studying the foundations of authority identified by Max Weber at:



- ▶ 1. Traditions: These depend on the strength of social institutions that protect the traditional value system.<sup>28</sup>
- ▶ 2. Charisma: It depends on personality traits (like most revolutionary systems).
- ▶ 3. Rational legality: It is based on obedience to the rules of whoever is in office (bureaucratic systems).

It seems, at the present time, that the first and second sources are weakening in favor of the third, which raises a question about the reasons for this decline. Here, these indicators must be mentioned:<sup>29</sup>

- ▶ 1. The problem of replacing the authority of the elected by the authority of the expert, where both have their own legitimacy.
- ▶ 2. Globalization (market, culture, power selection mechanisms, etc.) has weakened local traditions.
- ▶ 3. Globalization has led to the expansion of the elite bases, and scientific creativity has weakened the chances of charisma...
- ▶ 4. The decline of the status of the nation-state, as the erosion of the state takes place from above (through delegating some of its powers to international organizations, multinational companies, non-governmental organizations, etc.), and from below (minorities, sub-cultures, migrations, violent organizations and the local community... etc.). The traditional state is giving up its traditional functions, and the state has become “bigger than minor problems but smaller than major problems,”<sup>30</sup> which explains the depth of internal turmoil and the cracking of the walls of the nation-state. Otherwise, how can we explain that from 1989 to present, 5% of wars were international wars while the rest were internal wars in the nation-state,<sup>31</sup> resulting in the deaths of nine million people and 65 million refugees?<sup>32</sup> The linear decline of international wars and the increase of civil wars indicate the expansion of the non-zero game of international relations, and the growth of organic ties at the expense of mechanical ties as described by Emile Durkheim in his well-known theory of the division of labor.
- ▶ 5. Declining trust in governments as the Edelman Trust Barometer indicated that the study of samples from industrialized and underdeveloped countries in different continents reveals continuous decline in people’s trust in governments, business institutions, non-governmental organizations and the media.<sup>33</sup>





A study on the levels of trust in governments between 1981 and 2000 implies a general decline, but at different rates in different regions of the world, as follows:<sup>34</sup>

- ▶ 1. Latin America: 26%.
- ▶ 2. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics: 29%.
- ▶ 3. Western Europe: 4%.

#### Fourth: Future Authority Scenarios<sup>35</sup>

When building a matrix of mutual influence between these data and their interactions, scenarios of the upcoming forms of political power emerge through the interaction of three parties:

**Table 2: Matrix of Mutual Influence of the Components of the Political Community**

| Parties                                     | Government | Citizens | Giant digital companies | Size of Influence |
|---|------------|----------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Government</b>                           | *          | 2        | 1                       | 3                 |
| <b>Citizens</b>                             | 2          | *        | 1                       | 3                 |
| <b>Giant, especially digital, companies</b> | 3          | 2        | *                       | 5                 |

➡ Based on the matrix, the structure of authority “in the future” is moving towards one of the following models:

#### 1. Auto-democracy

It is mainly characterized by decentralized authority and self-organizing communities. The orientation drivers for such a scenario are:

- ▶ a. Widening social gap.
- ▶ b. Loosening the grip of power.
- ▶ c. Limited public services.

➡ This will result in:

- ▶ a. Sensing the power of citizens so they themselves manage public utilities.

- ▶ b. Electronic means of communication will spread effective ideas quickly.
- ▶ c. The strength of citizens' participation in political affairs at the local level, leaving the rest indirectly to the central authorities and major corporations.

➡ The model drivers are:

- ▶ a. Widening social gap.
- ▶ b. Erosion of the financial capabilities of the state.
- ▶ c. The growing role of digital platforms.
- ▶ d. Decentralization and the decreasing size of the administrative apparatus.

## 2. Private Algocracy

Which means replacing bureaucratic rules, management and control by a computer network through a set of mathematical, logical and sequential steps necessary to solve a problem. This process is run by companies that acquire data and information from different national sources and manage the decision-making processes of individuals and governments.



➡ The function of this model is:

- ▶ a. Data on all parties is accumulated by digital giants.
- ▶ b. This is monitored by major surveillance companies, and they are not required to disclose their information or sources.
- ▶ c. Analyzing and identifying the political interests of the individual through his data (smart election).

➡ The model drivers are:

- ▶ a. Giant digital companies cooperate with each other to the extent of great control.
- ▶ b. Informational and data integration of everything.
- ▶ c. Expanding the economic activities of giant digital companies to include public services.

- ▶ d. Reducing democracy in public life.
- ▶ e. Replacing the United Nations by World Economic Forum.

### 3. Collaborative Government

This is done through:

- ▶ a. Expanding the artificial intelligence circle to analyze data in a specific time.
- ▶ b. Encouraging open and creative governments.
- ▶ c. Enhancing data protection and privacy.
- ▶ d. Increasing the valuation of unpaid businesses.
- ▶ e. Increasing citizen involvement in the government decision-making process.



### 4. Over-Regulatocracy

It is mainly characterized by excessiveness and complexity in the systems through which it operates, and digital platforms are nationalized and placed under the supervision of a democratic government. Also, services are available, but obtaining them goes through great complications, which will end when most trust in the government is lost.

Its drivers are:

- ▶ a. The increased criticism of global digital companies.

- ▶ b. The increasing use of artificial intelligence in decision-making.
- ▶ c. Increased need for social protection policies to meet growing social challenges.
- ▶ d. Increased need to justify public spending and accountability leads to increased bureaucratic hurdles.

### Conclusion

- ▶ 1. An accelerated decline in the status of power based on traditions, charisma and ideology in varying degrees.
- ▶ 2. Shifting the authority from being a ruler to a facilitator.
- ▶ 3. The widening base of the decision-makers and the erosion of the authority of the ruler.
- ▶ 4. The decline of the role of bureaucratic authority in favor of giant digital companies.
- ▶ 5. The increasing similarity of political systems.
- ▶ 6. Expanding the base of organic links at the expense of automated links.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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