

Effects of Democratic Citizenship on Pursuing Global Justice: from the perspective of the post-Soviet Georgia

Mikhail SHAVTVALADZE¹, Tbilisi State University, Georgia

Abstract

*T*hroughout the world history one particular pattern is obvious that people in all nations desperately strive towards justice. What justice really means and what it entails can have many definitions and explanations ranging from liberty to equal distribution of opportunities, however it often can be also associated with such concepts as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Although, significant progress have been made in this direction, notably abolishment of slavery, introduction of universal suffrage in most countries, alleviation of poverty, adoption of universal declaration of human rights, severe problems such as authoritarian regimes, conflicts, terrorism, inequality, environmental hazards, human trafficking, inadequate living standards and widespread poverty still largely persists and haunt us. Despite significant differences in attitudes towards global justice from country to country, based on its size, economic power and political influence across the globe, the above mentioned positive steps has been still made, yet plenty of problems still largely remain. Hence, it is interesting to find out how this progress has been achieved, was it global democratic process, economic development or something else. Looking from the perspective of the post-Soviet country such as Georgia, in this paper, firstly, I would like to explore what the concepts of global justice and democratic citizenship mean and how they can be related to each other. Secondly, I would like to find out what is the current state of democracy in Georgia and to what extent active political participation along with strong civil society can influence on pursuing justice not only domestically but also globally. Finally, I would like to examine what are those domestic and global factors that might inhibit the people's aspiration to global justice.

Keywords: global justice, democratic citizenship, democratization, political participation, civil society.

¹ **Mikhail Shavtvaladze**, 34, is a graduate who received his Bachelor in International Economic Relations at the Georgian Technical University in 2001. In 2010, he obtained a MA in Political Science at the Central European University. He has written his Master Thesis on the post-soviet transitions and conflict resolution. Currently, he works at the Tbilisi State University as an HESP - AFP (Academic Fellowship Program) fellow and visiting lecturer. His interests include comparative politics, international relations, democratization and state building, modernization and development, conflict resolution, and foreign policy analysis.

Introduction

Desperate efforts to achieve justice are well observable pattern in nature of humankind that can be traced throughout the entire history of the world. What justice really means and what it entails can have many definitions and explanations ranging from liberty to equal distribution of opportunities, however it often can be also associated with such concepts as democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

Although significant progress have been made in this direction, notably abolishment of slavery, introduction of universal suffrage in most countries, alleviation of poverty, adoption of the International Bill of Human Rights, severe problems such as authoritarian regimes, conflicts, terrorism, inequality, environmental hazards, discrimination of minority groups, inadequate living standards and widespread poverty are still largely persisting in our days. Despite significant differences in attitudes towards global justice from country to country, derived mostly from the uneven distributions of magnitudes, economic powers and political influences among countries in the world, the above mentioned positive steps has been still made, yet plenty of problems such as widespread poverty, illiteracy, discrimination of minorities, repressive regimes and corruption still largely remain.

Hence, it is not only interesting to find out how this progress has been achieved either through the means of democratization, economic development or something else, but also why so many above mentioned faults and problems still continue to haunt us.

Given that, whatever broad range of definitions and explanations the concept of global justice might entail, in this paper, I want to analyze the concept in relation with democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Consequently, in order to investigate the links between global justice and democratization as well as links between global justice and human rights, the post-Soviet Georgia, as a country case-study, will be examined.

Therefore, I firstly intend to explore what the concepts of democratic citizenship and global justice mean and how they can be linked to each other. Secondly, I would like to find out what is the current state of democratization process in Georgia and to what extent it can influence on pursuing justice globally. Finally, I would like to examine what are those domestic and global perspectives and challenges that can promote or hamper people's aspirations towards global justice.

Democratic citizenship versus injustices domestically and globally

In any political system or regime, be it totalitarian, authoritarian or democratic, individuals engage in certain forms of relationship with the existing government and its structures or institutions. However, the roles and the nature of such relationships vary across the regime types. If individuals in totalitarian or authoritarian regimes are considered to be mere subjects who are coerced to obey a dominant power's dictates and decrees, in democratic societies though, individuals are assumed to be main source of power and relationship between a citizen and government can be described as *social contract* based on justice, equality, the rule of law and peaceful manner to resolve social cleavages.

Contrary to the highly asymmetric relationship between a citizen and government observed in the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, where individuals play no role and have no say in shaping public policies that affect their everyday lives, the idea of social contract envisages active citizen participation in politics implying that government and governed are engaged in some kind of formal dialogue, deliberation or partnership with the aim to set overarching rules and common public goals, among which justice to be a primary.

Elaborated by such prominent thinkers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and others, the idea of a social contract dates back almost

six hundred years. Later on, namely in the second half of twentieth century, the *contractarian* theory was further expanded and examined by John Rawls. However, all these bright ideas pertinent to the establishing just societies, based on liberal, democratic and egalitarian values, were mostly limited to one particular nation-state.

As a result of the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the emerging world wars in first half of twentieth century and, finally, the intensified globalization processes of the last decades, resulting in rapid technological advance, have largely contributed to the increase in demand for global justice.

Hence, on the one hand, such call for global justice can be attributed to the intensive people's movements as within as well as across the countries precipitated generally by the globalization processes and their effects. While, on the other hand it can be also ascribed to the challenges that a particular nation or multi-nation state has faced in forms of environmental disasters, ethnic conflicts, poverty, corruption and autocratic regimes that become beyond the reach of citizens in any country.

Even though no *centralized authority* (Nagel, 2005, p. 116) yet exists to resolve all these injustices and address all those challenges found in today's *modern highly interrelated world* (Bozac, 2012, p. 451), emergence of the intergovernmental organizations (e.g. United

Nations, NATO, EU, WTO etc.), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and global civil movements (e.g. Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Oxfam, Medecines Sans Frontieres etc.) after the world war II, provide some kind of universal guidelines and rules for any state to promote justice, protect human rights and alleviate poverty at least within their national borders.

Consequently, all these globalization effects that lead to *the process of increasing connections in the areas of economics, communication, technology and politics* (Barrington et al., 2010, p. 87), together with widespread societal acceptance of democratic values, takes public sphere from domestic to global level. Successively, people's demand for justice, before confined within nation-state, expanded further towards global domain.

Political consequences of such global trends and developments can be observed in recent uprisings and revolutions taking place in Egypt, Tunisia and Libia, dubbed as the "Arab Spring", as well as movements such as "*Occupy*" and *the anti-austerity protests throughout Europe* (Lutsevych, 2013, p. 2). Particularly, these events illustrate to what extent mass *mobilization organized by means of the internet and mobile communication* (Castells, 2008, p. 87) can pose threat not only to dictatorial powers of the old authoritarian rulers, but also to follies and wrongdoings of

multilateral institutions (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 3018).

However, it is important to note that the coercive imposition of *democracy upon others* (Encarnacion, 2005, p. 50) by external powers may backfire resulting in even more chaos, violent conflicts or the consolidation of new dictatorial rules rather than democracy. Cases of such *democratic imperialism* (Encarnacion, 2005, p. 55) can be traced by observing US foreign policies in the early twentieth century towards the countries in the Central and South America. Hence, due to the United States' crusade in Latin America (e.g. in Mexico in 1914), *in the name of promoting democracy* (Encarnacion, 2005, p. 51), contributed to establish authoritarian one-party political system, lasting over the seventy years.

More recently, it was the US military intervention in Iraq under the Bush presidency, due to which, right after the invasion, Iraq turned into *a chaotic and violent land where thousands of civilians have been killed* (Encarnacion, 2005, p. 52). Hence, for the healthy democratization process to take place in any country, which in turn leads to more just and peaceful society, it is necessary for global powers *to promote democracy by example rather by force* (Encarnacion, 2005, p. 58). Subsequently, it can be noted that no matter how noble, liberal or democratic the ends are, they do not justify any means.

For that reason, instead of forceful or coercive means, democratic values in any society can be effectively promoted by means of education, free media and civil activism. Given that, the concept of democratic citizenship, introduced first at the national level by means of civil society organizations, education or mass media, can greatly contribute to more just and peaceful environment not only within the particular state but beyond its borders.

Hence, one of the main reason for such optimistic assumption is that albeit *the democratic mind* (Burroughs, 2011, p. 6) is hardly innate in humans, unlike egocentricity and ethnocentricity that *require no special training* (Burroughs, 2011, p. 6) as Walter Parker, in his book *Educating the Democratic Mind*, contends, cultivating democratic *habits and competences* (Burroughs, 2011, p. 6) through educational programmes, free media and civil society organizations can greatly induce citizens in any particular country to establish more just and democratic societies challenging domestic as well as global injustices.

In addition, the concept of democratic citizenship, apart of conceptions as *personally responsible, participatory and justice-oriented citizen* (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 239), also conceives such principles and skills as critical thinking, tolerance, the protection of human rights, inclusion, peace and consensus. Consequently, if adopted widely, through its

tendency to resolve conflicts peacefully, the concept of democratic citizenship can in turn lead to comparatively less unjust world than it is today. Therefore, it can be deduced that *connection between pursuing justice and seeking democracy* (Sen, 2009, p. ix) is rather obvious and it can extend to the global level.

State of democratization process in the post-Soviet Georgia: no justice without genuine democracy

Past sequence of events that took place in Georgia, the newly independent, small, multiethnic state that emerged from the rubbles of the Soviet Empire, clearly show the pattern that path towards democratic nation-building are not always smooth, but is rather characterized by chaos and violent political cleavages. As a consequence, Georgia's transition from the old totalitarian regime has not been resulted in a stable democratic system but rather in series of semi-authoritarian, hybrid regimes without strong, viable civil society and system of checks and balances.

Although, the causes of such dramatic turns of events are many and complex, at least some of the major causal effects such as soviet legacy expressed in undemocratic and illiberal political culture, political elite's ill-judged approaches to diversity issues, especially to the issues of ethnic minorities residing in the territory of Georgia, as well as unfavorable global circumstances that

significantly affected domestic outcomes, can be emphasized.

Speaking of the above mentioned specific type of Soviet political culture, during the late period of the USSR's existence, people in most union republics, including in Georgia, more or less tended to favor those ideals such as *freedom of movement, increased autonomy and cultural expression* (Beisinger, 2002, p. 48) instead of security and order. Such outcome can be attributed to the Gorbachev's reformist politics aimed to liberalization of the Soviet totalitarian system.

However, since the Soviet Union's demise, most citizens in Georgia started to favor order and security over freedom and democracy, largely due to the complete deterioration of economy, emerging violent conflicts, sharp rise of crime level, corruption and inequality. For example, CRRC's Caucasus Barometer 2010 Survey results show that more than fifty percent of the households surveyed in Georgia, versus 35 per cent, see the government's role as a parent rather than employee (Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2010).

Moreover, the claim with respect to citizens' preferences of order and security can be further substantiated by the fact that, over the last twenty year period, people in Georgia became overwhelmingly supportive towards the Georgian Orthodox Church and its leader Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia,

Ilia II. For example, according to the recent opinion polls conducted in Georgia by IRI (International Republican Institute) among the *three most trusted institutions* (International Republican Institute, 2012) the Georgian Orthodox Church tops by 93 percent, followed by the army (89 percent) and police (87 percent).

Furthermore, looking the Georgia's post-Soviet political culture from the lenses of the Almond and Verba's Civic Culture Theory, it can be noticed that in the form of the Soviet legacy of totalitarian regime, due to its highly centralized nature of *nomenklatura* (Wheatley, 2005, p. 21) Georgia inherited the type of civic culture, more characterized as "subject" and "deferential" rather than "participatory". As a result most citizens in Georgia yielded most of their powers to the newly emerged charismatic leaders, in hopes that the incumbent will resolve all their socioeconomic issues and provide justice and fairness.

Consequently, every successive post-Soviet leader, whether Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze or Saakashvili, who emerged as a result of overwhelming popular vote, misused their powers in their own ways. If the first President Gamsakhurdia's hyper-nationalistic appeals largely contributed to the escalation of civic and ethnic conflicts leading to coup d'état, the next President Shevardnadze's rule, aside of devastating military conflict in Abkhazia, was marked by

widespread corruption, clientelism, economic stagnation and lawlessness.

As for the third President Saakashvili, an US educated lawyer *who surged to power in the peaceful Rose Revolution of 2003* (de Waal, 2012), instead to consolidate democracy and resolve the frozen ethnic conflicts peacefully, he choose to solidify his own power through amending the Constitution. As a result, Saakashvili acquired power to initiate and veto legislation, to abolish existing laws, and dissolve parliament (Shavtvaladze, 2012, p. 36).

Because of such undemocratic political setting and the absence of *judicial independence* (Barrington et al., 2010, p. 280) in Georgia, that was characterized the Saakashvili's nine year rule, it become even more difficult for ordinary citizens to find justice at the national level. Moreover, despite more effective measures taken by Saakashvili's government to eliminate petty corruption that increased state revenues further (Shavtvaladze, 2012, p. 38), it turns out that throughout this period, largest part of these revenues and most efforts of the ruling elite were directed towards building an authoritarian police state rather than democratic political system.

For that reason, Saakashvili and his ruling party (United National Movement) created *an extensive – and very lakely illegal – surveillance and security apparatus in Georgia* (Cecire, 2012, p. 2) based on the *harsh “zero tolerance” policy*

on crime (Dolidze & de Waal, 2012). Hence, if in one case modern communication technologies are used for mass mobilization against authocracy and government injustices, in another case the same tools are employd by the authoritarian rulers to strenghten their grip on the society they rule. As a result, many political opponets and activists objecting the regime, ended up in jail without fair trial, their private properties were forcefully extorted and some of them even became subject of killings (e.g. Sandro Girgvliani's case, in 2006) and phisical abuse. Consequently, unable to find justice at the national level due to the Georgia's highly unjust judiciary system, with the acquital rate close to nil, many citizens in Georgia who become victims of such systemic violence sanctioned by Saakashvili's regime, had to apply for the European judiciary institutions, such as the European Court of Human Rights in Strasburg.

Even if the recent electoral victory of the main opposition “Georgian Dream” coalition over the ruling “United National Movement” party in the last October 2012 parliamentary elections can be regarded as a positive signal that more participatory political culture has been emerged in Georgia and *peaceful transfer of power is possible despite numerous obstacles* (Lutsevych, 2013, p. 2), it hardly denotes that Georgia has already consolidated its democracy.

Thus, further commitments to the democratic values, as among general public as well as governing elites, is yet to be seen, meaning that faced again with issues of transitional justice, it remains to be seen whether the Georgian society will approach these challenges with loyalty to democratic ethos, *transparency and due process* (Cecire, 2012).

Furthermore, speaking of the current state and extent of Georgia's civic and political culture, it is important to highlight that the recent student protests movements, which was triggered due to the leak of *shocking video evidence of torture and abuse, including rape, from Tbilisi's notorious Gldani Prison* (Dolidze & de Waal, 2012) can be regarded as positive step towards the direction of democratic citizenship.

Accordingly, unlike to the previous youth mobilizations in Georgia, influenced mostly by concrete political forces, in most cases by certain political parties or movements, this new student movements were marked by its impartiality, inclusiveness and demands for more democracy and stronger citizens role in shaping public policies and bringing *social change* (Lutsevych, 2013) rather interesting in the victory of concrete political groups.

However, it is also important to stress that despite the Rose Revolution was *perceived by the West as a triumph of civil society* (Lutsevych, 2013, p. 2) largely due to *twenty years of Western democracy assistance aimed at supporting*

civil society in Georgia (Lutsevych, 2013), civil activism in this post-Soviet country, and the current state of civil society in general, remains feeble, meaning incapable to exercise due oversight functions and hold authorities accountable to their citizens (Lutsevych, 2013). Such weaknesses of civil society in Georgia can be explained by number of aspects, among which, most important can be the Soviet legacy of totalitarian communist regime, absence of class cleavages, *clientelism*, political patronage and civic apathy.

Due to highly unequal distribution of military, political and economic power among the countries across the world, as just as well as unjust actions of global powers or superpowers can significantly affect democratic outcomes in much less powerful, small countries such as Georgia. Hence, speaking specifically of Georgia's case, although Russia's neo-imperialistic attitudes and politics, particularly over the last twenty year period, can be hardly regarded as constructive for Georgia's statehood and democracy, *Western partiality* (Cecire, 2012) and double standards failed either to foster genuine democratization processes in Georgia.

While, *many officials in the West saw the Rose Revolution as having been led by Western-oriented reformers* (Mitchel, 2012), many severe wrongdoings and human rights abuses done by the Saakashvili's regime against its fellow

citizens were overlooked and not assessed and studied properly. Therefore, the question is to what extent the self-proclaimed strong pro-western attitudes by certain leaders or political groups should be automatically counted by the Western institutions as pro-democratic and liberal ones. Since, as the recent Georgian example clearly demonstrates it is possible to build authoritarian system even under the guise of neoliberal values such as free market or laissez-faire economy.

Perspectives and major challenges to pursue justice domestically and globally: closing remarks

The aim of this paper is to analyze the linkage between attempts to establish democratic system and pursuing global justice. Based on many observations and the employed studies in this field, it can be concluded that democracy is essential part of just societies whether at the national or global level. Hence, despite globalization phenomenon, *which had been set in motion two decades earlier* (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 3018), leading to growing role and influence of international networks and organizations and diminishing capabilities of national governments to tackle new challenges effectively, even within their controlled boundaries, justice globally still can be achieved through the *organized civil power*

(Lutsevych, 2013, p. 3) that will be based on the concept of democratic citizenship.

However path towards relatively more just world, specifically through the democratization process can be complex and might consist of several stages. In the first stage, for instance, through introducing the concept of democratic citizenship at the country level, by means of education, free media or civil society organizations, can lead to much more stronger and viable civil society capable to promote the rule of law, protect human rights and hold national governments and businesses accountable to the public. Apparently, such optimistic outcome should be expected because of active, inclusive, participatory and consensus based approaches this type of citizenship presumes to resolve existing conflicts peacefully and uphold universal human rights nationally.

Consequently, in the second stage, the civil society groups, created at the national level in the first place, can also easily become agents or parts of global civil society movements or INGOs, mainly through such *phenomena as modern communications networks and new information technology* (Held, 1997, p. 253). Given that, shared with the universal principles and concepts of democratic citizenship, the newly emerged civil society groups will be able not only to resist *the symbols of unbridled globalization* (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 3018) but also to question critically

the actions of *power hungry states and profit-driven markets* (Chandhoke, 2007) and hold them accountable to general public.

Finally, speaking of domestic and global challenges along the path leading to global justice specifically via democratization process, from the perspective of the post-Soviet Georgia, several internal and external factors can be identified. Hence, among internal factors, most important of them can be ascribed to the Soviet legacy of the totalitarian rule, reflected in weak civil society, civic apathy, corruption, informal rules of *clientelism* and political patronage, intolerance towards minority groups and poverty. As for specific relationship between poverty and democratic outcome, many social scientists argue that *as income rises, so does civic activism* (Clover, 2012).

Whereas, given the sharp disbalances of power that exists among the countries in today's highly interrelated world, most important external factors that might have significant effects on democratization processes in the post-Soviet country such as Georgia can be related to how just and democratic the policies and actions of global superpowers as well as international financial institutions will be particularly with respect to small countries.

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