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US Presidential Election 2020

Post-Globalisation and Trump

By Deep K Datta-Ray

SYNOPSIS

Significant changes are underway as the fundamental premise in electoral politics and inter-state relations is moving towards an unorthodox model exemplified by Donald Trump, as he continues to break norms in a bid to build a dedicated support base. His antics have magnified the implications of the post-globalisation era.

COMMENTARY

AS PRESIDENT of the United States, Donald Trump has been the foremost practitioner of a highly unorthodox model of politics. Its latest instance is Trump's exceptional, and troubling, refusal to concede electoral defeat. Nevertheless, his brand of politics is seeing some political figures around the world mirroring him in a bid to build and sustain a dedicated and passionate support base.

For Trump, a key factor has been passion, which guided policy decisions at home and abroad. He signalled this approach in his inauguration in January 2017, when he [declared](#): "From this moment on, it's going to be America First." That informed his decisions, such as having the US [quit](#) the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. This action depleted global goodwill Washington D.C., had earned by long being in the forefront of battles against debilitating diseases and health crises.

Post-Globalisation Politics

Trump's style of politics has become a defining characteristic of "post-globalisation" in which politics are based on emotional bias rather than conventional interests. This is

a dramatic change for it changes what we know as the anchor for politics and the governance of nation-states.

At the centre of the change Trump is emblematic of is post-globalisation undoing the historical entwinement of vested interests with politics. That intermeshing began in 19th century Europe, spread to the US, and was defined by voting rights being contingent on [property ownership](#). The shackling of politics to such interests had cultural and other repercussions.

The vote began to be prised away from the propertied class from the close of the 19th century and the electorate began to expand. Yet property continued to maintain its grip on politics. The means were political parties, most of which continued to guard the interests of the propertied class.

Today, that class has expanded and vastly multiplied its holdings. So much so, that the propertied class' assets are often demarcated as nations and its history of ownership is viewed as national history.

The fastening of politics to interests founded in the depths of history and across the globe had a purpose: to promote stability by suppressing the alternative: passion. Unfettered by interests, passions are effervescent and ephemeral.

Most significantly, the politics of passion is contingent on personality and triggered unpredictability – as seen in Trump's actions considered “un-presidential” as well as his very heavy use of Twitter to castigate opponents.

Trumpian Politics Globally

Similarly, in international politics, Trump gambled America's interests in further developing an ally by threatening [retaliation](#) against India for its decision to not export a drug for COVID-19, because it is clinically unproven.

Indicating the significance of passion is Trump's outsider status that undermined the longstanding interests of the Republicans in the US. The hollowing-out in terms of policy is so complete that the established ideals and code of conduct of the Republican Party were effectively relegated by Trump's “Make America Great Again” rhetoric and the policies they catalysed. Nor is Trump alone in eviscerating the politics of interests. In Asia, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, was the unexpected [outsider](#) who swept away the Bharatiya Janata Party's establishment. Another instance from Asia is Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. He [broke](#) multiple norms – and has been castigated by many in other countries – but remains highly popular with most of his country's citizens.

Similarly, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Hungarian President Viktor Orbán too have shifted away from interests. Bolsonaro has repeatedly ignored the threat of COVID-19 to the national interests by dismissing it as “[a little cold](#)”.

Meanwhile, Orbán is undermining Hungary's national interests by [turning away](#) from the benefits of membership in the European Union. EU parliamentarians and officials

are becoming more concerned with what they see as the Hungarian leader's "illiberal tendencies" which have resonance with voters in his country.

Unprecedented Norms of Post-Globalisation

Behaviour that breaks norms arising from interests is the main agent of post-globalisation. The changes to politics they triggered are tangible. Established patterns of trade and investment are being changed, and on a scale unseen since the end of the Cold War.

Trump's *diktats* to governments in and out of the US, for example, his curtailing of private consumers' choice, and rejecting of green and sustainable environment policies are unprecedented. A clear case is the [prohibition](#) on Google collaborating with Huawei. Also, entire regions like the Middle East are told to [choose](#) between Washington and Beijing.

Another effect of these changes is that the very language of politics is being remade. For instance, Scotland's desire for the European Union is called nationalism but is unlike the usual understanding of that word. That is because Scotland's desires are now disconnected to property and so the history and geography of nation-states. Indeed, London is [preparing](#) to counter moves by Scotland to exit the UK to join the EU.

The politics of passion however do engender possibilities unseen previously. The personification of politics makes for an intensity and dynamism impossible in the old model because it was motivated by just property (that is, national interests).

Managing the Volatility of Trumpian Politics

Note for instance the US [engagement](#) with North Korea in 2018, regarded by Trump as a breakthrough, although it yielded not much more than a photo opportunity. It did not produce the Nobel Peace Prize Trump was hoping to get, though the sessions with Kim Jong-Un created history, which the president talked up as his achievement.

In the North Korea case, Trump did not just break a norm, he crushed it when agreeing to meet the head of a government the US had no relations with and who is feared could launch missile attacks. Trump passionately sought a nuclear deal with Kim, who he said wrote him beautiful letters and that the two "fell in love".

However, that Trump was heavily criticised at home and away for appearing to get on better with dictators than with America's traditional allies, indicates the perils of his unconventional model of politics.

Evidently the politics of post-globalisation is marked by volatility. What this calls for is agility and flexibility in management, not just by calculating interests but also viewing them through the prism of emotions and segmentation of policy issues, as leaders across the globe increasingly utilise both. Donald Trump has shown another dimension of the art of the possible.

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