Global Power Shifts and the Changing Human Rights Agenda in The Twenty First Century

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Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of how the relationship between the changing global power structure and the reshaping of the international human rights agenda are associated with the twenty first century. It is making the argument that the end of Western Hegemony and the emergence of multipolarity have undermined the universality of liberal human rights norms, substituting them with disputable, pluralist structures based on geopolitical rivalry and normative competition. Empirical research underlines the views on the counterproductive role of Chinese focus on economic growth and sovereignty, Russian disruptive resistance, or selective pragmatism of regional and middle powers in undermining the accountability of the institutions and weakening the enforcement mechanisms. The paper represents the process of retrenchment of core rights where it involves civil liberties, gender equality, migration, and digital privacy as symptomatic of institutional weakness and politicization. The study shows that the human rights issues are becoming reciprocal-dependent of the strategic selectivity and transactional diplomacy in place of principled universality by relating structural power transitions to the particular human rights issues to tackle. Finally, the paper argues that human rights governance in the future would be less about hegemonic enforcement but rather negotiated consensus using various actors and this essentially challenges the basis of legitimate, accountability and sustainability of rights in a disintegrated global order.

Keywords: Multipolarity, Global Power Shifts, Human Rights Norms, Institutional Erosion, Normative Contestation

Introduction

The world of international power has experienced a fundamental change since the Cold War that shifted it through the one-polar world and the competition of the multipolar system into a more complicated and pluralist one. This shift, which has occurred due to the quick ascendancy of the states like China, India, and regional blocs has not only changed the mechanics of international politics it has also changed the normative frameworks through which the global politics and discourse of human rights are based. Although the post-world war II liberal order ensured human rights become central to international relations, the structures of emerging power and the resultant geopolitical contests have questioned the relevance, efficacy and credibility of global human rights agenda in the twenty first century. According to the modern researchers, the distribution of material power is not only relocating west to east and also into the form of a diffusion among the state and non-state actors, but also leading to a normative contestation of the meaning, scope and enforcement of human rights globally (Qader et al., 2025). The main focus of the study is to critically question the interaction of the power changes in the world and development of human rights agenda in the twenty first century by arguing that the turn towards multipolarity has upset the same set of human rights standards, undermined institutional practices of accountability and

provided room to new forms of conceiving of rights that are alternative to the liberal internationalist traditions. Simply put, this paper argues that the evolution of geopolitical balances has not only reinvented strategic priorities across states, but has also redefined the very formulation of human rights, contentious issues around it, and the manner in which it may be sought within the international institutions. The introduction of illiberal norms, the contraction of Western hegemony, and the development of authoritarian forms of government all have been factors that have led to the disintegration of the consensus regarding human rights principles that makes it difficult to defend fundamental freedoms within various geopolitical areas. This normative erosion has been reportedly growing and scholars have pointed to the fact that authoritarian actors do not merely resist human rights pressures but are also actively reforming the institutional fabric of global governance to support strategic interests and ideas of sovereignty (Cordell & Dukalskis, 2025). This inquiry is important in both the accurate comprehension of the structural forces involved, and in the expression of the implications of change to individuals, minority communities, and civil society actors whose rights are the most susceptible to change in global priorities and geopolitical contests. With the increased diffused power and increasingly disputed norms, the tools of enforcing human rights by the United Nations, regional, or transnational networks are subjected to practical and ideological challenges. According to recent reports by international authorities, there is a loss of consensus on rights protection, the United Nations High Commissioner to Human Rights has warned that decades-old structures are put under more strain than ever with the pressure of authoritarian leadership and geopolitical competition (Turk, 2025).

It is therefore on the lines of this introduction that the map of an argument is drawn which puts the issue of human rights in the place between power and principle: a shifting geography where new state actors, institutional stalemate, and rival views of world order reconfigure the question of what human rights are, and under what circumstances they are sought. The next sections will delve into the details of these dynamics by first reviewing the pertinent theoretical frameworks and literature and then conducting empirical research on the dynamics of power transitions and its implications to the human rights agenda. This paper seeks to provide an input into a fine-tuning of the perspective of global power interruption with human rights in the twenty first century by critically addressing recent scholarship, policy arguments, and institutional changes.

Theoretical Framework
To explain the linkage between the dynamics in global power and the changing human rights agenda, there is a need to have a sound theoretical basis that will bring into being the international relations theory and the critical scholarship in the field of human rights. Conventional conceptions of power in world politics have always focused on material prowess, nation-state and strategic advantage but the following changes are currently requiring a wider analytical prism that expresses normative contention, institutional reform, and ideational warfare. This part is a critical review of important theoretical approaches and new academic discussions on which the idea of power transition paradigm reformulates human rights meaning, priority, and prominence implementation in the twenty-first century.

Why Power is Global, International Order, and Normative Authority
According to classical realist theory, world power is a factor of the ability of material capabilities and strategic pre-employability, and human rights are secondary to the interests of the core state. In this view, the existence of international norms, such as alliances of human rights is only upheld to the extent that they conform to the desires of the powerful nations. According to scholars, a liberal international order in the post-Cold War world was not formed due to the mere adhesion to norms, but rather an outcome of unquestioned hegemony of Western nations that created their values in international organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank, and even

international law. With the loss of Western authority, the normativity that supported these institutions disintegrates, which means that human rights norms are no longer resistant to challenges and partial implementation. In their turn the methods of liberal institutionalists are focused on the importance of international institutions and law regimes that restrict the actions of states and ensure their collaboration in the environment of shared values, such as human rights. Nonetheless, recent sources point out the fact that these bodies are becoming more and more paralysed by the geopolitical competition, partial obedience, and deterioration in legitimacy among the emerging powers that view the institutions as being used as the instrument of Western supremacy instead of impartial arbiters (Acharya, 2019; Zurn, 2021). The result of this loss of institutional credibility is direct impact on the human rights enforcement, especially where such veto powers and strategic alliances subvert accountability responses in institutions like the UN Human Rights Council and the Security Council. Constructivist scholars are more detailed and would emphasize on norms, identity, and discourse because human rights are constructed socially and as power structures evolve, they are subject to redefinition. In this perspective, the emergence of non-western powers brings in other normative models that undermine the universality of liberal human rights to prioritize the sovereign states, development, and social stability over personal political freedoms (Bettiza & Lewis, 2020). These competing discourses indicate more profound conflicts as to whose values will constitute universal values, and human rights represents the domain of ideological struggle as opposed to a domain of consensus.

Development and Changing Human Rights Norms in an evolving Global Order
The human right regime after World War II relied on the idea that the state would have some limitations and more protection to individuals over time due to the moral advancement and the codification of the law. In the unipolar era that existed in the 1990s, human rights activism enjoyed the good of the day courtesy of Western leadership, theories of humanitarian intervention and networked transnational civil societies. Nevertheless, researchers slowly come to the conclusion that it was a unique moment in history and not a balance sheet (Moyn, 2020). The human rights agenda around the globe has entered the retrenchment and fragmentation phase since the beginning of the 2000s (and even worse since 2010). Democratic backsliding, a shrinking civic space, and the normalized emergency governance are all recorded by empirical studies even in well-established democracies (Freedom House, 2023; V-Dem Institute, 2024). These tendencies are highly associated with changes of global power because emerging authoritarian and hybrid governments actively oppose foreign intervention in the field of human rights and provide alternative forms of governance based on the principles of greater economic development and political stability rather than liberal freedoms. Recent writing underlines that modern human rights issues are not merely those that involve violation of rights, but also the redefining of rights. The economic development, digital sovereignty, and cultural relativism are all getting used as the reasons why civil and political rights should be limited specifically by powerful states that are interested in keeping the internal practices out of the international monitoring (Ginsburg, Chernykh, and Elkins, 2022). The process is supplemented through the normative reframing of the strategic partnerships between the states that are skeptical of the liberal discourse of human rights, thus weakening the collective mechanisms of pressure.

Authoritarian Persistence and Normative Disputation
Much recent scholarship concentrates on the empowerment of authoritarian power in international institutions of governance, and its effects on human rights. Instead of disengaging with the international organizations, most of the authoritarian states are crafters of them to refract the international rules within their countries to propagate the propaganda of noninterference, national sovereignty, and development based on rights (Dukalskis and Patane, 2019). Under this approach, such states can challenge the human rights norms without having to openly denounce international

law thus undermining the implementation of the law without having to renounce it. According to scholars, this type of normative contestation is a structural problem of universal human rights since it turns global institutions into an ideological contest instead of a normative one (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). The resultant effect is that accountability is being gradually undermined where human rights abuses are being more than ever being framed as domestic issues or being justified by use of security, cultural, or developmental discourses. This trend is demonstrated by the increasing power of China and Russia in the multilateral forums with it being seen that both nations use both economic networks and diplomatic alliances to dampen criticism and further advance other governance standards.

Knowledge Rift in the Literature and Conceptual Input
Although there is some useful material in the current scholarship on the topics of power transitions and human rights issues, the gaps are still significant. A large part of the literature considers changes in power and decline in human rights as two independent processes, not interrelated. Additionally, the geopolitical analysis and the issue specific human rights areas of digital surveillance, climate justice and migration governance are not well integrated. The aim of the paper is to fill such gaps by analytically connecting the shifts on structural power with the changing priorities on human rights relying on the argument that the distribution of power in the world is actively transformed, both to change the agenda, definition of human rights norms, and their institutional feasibility. Placing human rights in the context of the larger dynamics of multipolar competition, this study enhances a critical paradigm that goes beyond the normative idealism and recognizes the politics and economic calculus of rights talk in the twenty-first century. The next section continues on this theoretical basis by reviewing the empirical aspects of the global power changes and its practical implication on international governance.

Global Power Shifts in the 21st Century
Changing of the world dominant order in the twenty first century is one of the most impactful processes that influence international politics and regulation of human rights. The decline of Western domination, added to the emergence of new forces of economic and political power, has altered power balance in such a manner that has a fundamental impact on the assumptions that the liberal international order is based on. Diffusion, contestation and fragmentation of power marks the nature of contemporary power transition between one hegemon to another, which is creating multiple polarity in the world, enabling competing pictorial models of governance and normativity to coexist in a state of unease. These dynamics play an important role towards the global human rights agenda as influence of power becomes more influential in defining which norms are to be considered, implemented, or peripheralized.

Western Hegemony Deterioration and Liberal Leadership Crisis
During the post-Cold War era, the United States and its allies wielded a disproportionate amount of influence in alliances world institutions in most instances of promoting human rights by use of diplomacy, conditionality, and in certain instances, coercive intervention. This hegemony enabled liberal norms to be entrenched in international law, development models and international regimes of governance. This role in leadership, however, as has been noted recently, is significantly deteriorated in Western aptitude and willingness to maintain this role. The influence of the West has been limited by strategic overstretch, polarization of domestic politics, economic crises, and legitimacy crises to lower the credibility as well as the capacity of human rights advocacy in foreign nations (Patel, 2025). The withdrawal of major Western players on the multilateralism issue has also undermined the institutional requirements of the human rights regime. The abandonment of global treaties, inconsistent use of human rights institutions, and setting security and economic imperatives above commitments to a normative leadership have indicated a change

in principles. Critics believe that such disparity has destabilized the moral authority of Western states to give rhetoric and political room to other centers of power to dispute the universality of liberal human rights standards (Zurn, 2021). Consequently, the human rights promotion is also becoming more seen as not being a task that the world shares, but rather a means that is applied selectively as a part of major geopolitics.

The Rise of China and Alternative Models of World Influence

The emergence of China as one of the major economic and political and institutional players will be among the most important sources of reconfiguring power globally. The increasing influence that China is exerting in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the international organization has brought along a new form of governance that does not follow the liberal democratic standards. Instead of dismissing human rights per se, the Chinese discourse refers to economic growth, social order and national sovereignty as central elements of human welfare and usually poses civil and political rights as auxiliary or depending on culture (Bettiza and Lewis, 2020). This practice has been finding grounds in developing states who have their way-out of western conditionality and normative pressure. China has established partnerships through various programs like big infrastructure, the financing of development and the diplomacy that diminish the leveraging power of the traditional human rights practices. According to scholars, this type of influence reforms the global human rights agenda by making it so that the dominant view on human rights is that collective economic rights are more important than individual freedoms, which undermines the normative hierarchy in international human rights law (Ginsburg et al., 2022). The increased presence of China in multilateral institutions enhances the normative influence of this country even more. This can be done by making more representation in United Nations bodies and organizations that set the standard to facilitate covert but significant changes in language, priorities and procedural norms. These alterations do not demolish the human rights regime in any wholesome manner but they re-tune its prioritization which undermines the mechanisms of enforcing it and update the accountability in a manner that is more consistent with the state centric understandings of sovereignty.

Russia, Strategy Disruption, and Normative Resistance

Whereas China is exemplarily a systemic alternative, the contribution of Russia to the development of the global power is that of strategic disruption and normative resistance. Russia has aggressively challenged western influence by intervening in military, using energy diplomacy and disinformation campaigns and at the same time denying any foreign examination of its domestic human rights practices. According to the scholars, the strategy of Russia is an example of how a weak or revisionist state can use asymmetric weapons to break liberal norms without providing an alternative system of governance (Cooley and Nexon, 2020). Russia has been against any human rights resolution in the multilateral forums, which it feels there is violation of sovereignty or sanctioning outside interference. This opposition is a factor of institutional paralysis especially in the United Nations Security Council where the veto power limits joint action against acts of mass atrocities and the infringement of human rights. The wider impact is that it is normalized to offer complacency of not doing, whereby geopolitical competition trumps normative commitment, and human rights creation is often put at the second level to strategic computing.

Decentralization of Power and Regional and Middle Powers

More than the major powers, the spreading of the influence to the regional and middle powers has made the world order even more complex. India, Turkey, Brazil and Saudi Arabia and other states are more and more adopting independent foreign policies that are selective in choosing which norms to use and strategic pragmatism. Such actors are usually favorable to human rights rhetoric but undemanding to adhere to any binding commitment that binds domestic governance, and this

move is part of a wider tendency of instrumental relations with world norms (Hurrell, 2023). Also more and more significant role in determining human rights outcomes is played by regional organizations, yet their performance also varies significantly. In other contexts, regional mechanisms offer new mechanisms of protecting rights, whereas in others they uphold the norm of sovereignty and nonintervention which restricts accountability. This disproportionate topography highlights the disintegration of the global human rights regime in which the application and understanding of the law vary among regions, depending on power distributions and political agendas.

Implications of Multipolarity for Global Governance

The cumulative effect of these power shifts is the emergence of a multipolar system marked by normative pluralism and institutional strain. In such an environment, no single actor possesses the authority or capacity to enforce human rights universally, and collective action is increasingly constrained by rivalry and mistrust. Scholars emphasize that multipolarity does not inherently undermine human rights, but it transforms the conditions under which norms operate, shifting the balance from universal enforcement toward negotiated and often diluted standards (Moyn, 2020). This transformation raises critical questions about the future of human rights governance. As power becomes more dispersed, the legitimacy of global norms depends less on hegemonic enforcement and more on negotiated consensus among diverse actors with competing interests and values. The next section examines how these structural changes directly affect the human rights agenda, focusing on institutional erosion, issue specific challenges, and emerging forms of normative contestation.

Human Rights Agenda in a Changing World Order

The recent rebalancing of world power in the twenty first century has radically transformed the priorities, institutions and validity of the international human rights agenda. With the extensive and decentralized dispersion of power, and with a stronger propensity towards intense geopolitical rivalry, human rights are more and more brought into a negotiated place in a splintered normative space than enforced using some kind of universal consensus. This part is a critical analysis of how the global human rights environment has altered because of institutional erosion and issue specific problems and emergent alternative norms which has signified a change of principled universality into strategic selectivity and politicization. The human rights institutions of the international system were initially established with the primary aim of operating in the rather stable power structure where the norms would be diffused and enforced with the help of diplomatic pressure, legal tools, and moral authority. Non-Western pressure is growing on these institutions as well as resistance is increasing in the contemporary world of global order, where the commitment of the west is diminishing. Researchers note that multilateral human rights agencies become dishonest, frozen, and politicized more and more, which restricts their ability to respond romantically to violations (Ginsburg et al., 2022). The human rights council of the United Nations is an example of this crisis. Although it is the main discussion on human rights, it is limited in its effectiveness due to bloc politics, strategic voting and the state with poor human rights record are also part of the membership. According to reports made by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner to the Human Rights, there is an increasing degree of unwillingness among states to collaborate with special rappapours and investigation mechanisms, especially when influential allies offer diplomatic protection. This weakening of institutional authority frustrates accountability and creates the myth that the enforcement of human rights is unfair and politically arbitrary. Moreover, the undermining of the global unity has facilitated the instrumentalization of sovereignty by states as an insulation mechanism against questions. The appeal to noninterference norms especially by the powerful states in the region has socialized opposition to the monitoring of others and eroded the authority of international institutions. Consequently, the rhetoric

contesting, but not protective, role of the global human rights regime is becoming more and more prominent.

Retrenchment in the Domains of Core Human Rights
The effects of power transitions are especially noticeable in the cutback of safeguards in most important human rights areas. Civil and political rights have been significantly decreasing, and scholars have registered a rise in suppression of freedom of expression and assembling, as well as political participation in various political regimes. Backsliding of democratic principles and the normalization of emergency politics have also compromised institutional constraints and civil rights, in even those states having historically developed around democratic principles (V Dem Institute, 2024). The issue of women rights and gender equality has also become a debatable arena of the global human rights agenda. Though the international law structures stand firm, the lapses in implementation have been increased through the opposition of politics, relativism based on culture, and the change in priorities of development. Global evaluations reveal a current standstill or backsliding in indicators of gender equality, especially in so-called authoritarian models of governance and the countries where the international pressure is constrained by the strategy (UN Women, 2023). The other area in which changes in global power have reconfigured normative commitments is the migration and refugee rights. The nationalistic upsurge, the securitization of borders and geopolitical bargaining has uprooted humanitarian values, geographical control of migration has been externalized and restrictive asylum policies have been instituted. Experts believe that migrant treatment is becoming more and more biased by power relations instead of the law because other influential states use financial and security advantages to transfer the task onto those who are weaker (Betts, 2021). The rights to the digital self and privacy have become acute areas of human rights regulation, directly dependent on the power of technology and the ability of the state. With the growth of digital surveillance, artificial intelligence, and data governance, a new type of rights vulnerability has materialized, especially in situations where authoritarian influence encourages centric control of the state over the circulation of information. This lack of a coherent international system of regulating digital rights is a part of the process of wider fragmentation in governance as states are more concerned with technological sovereignty and security than with individual freedoms (Deibert, 2023).

Normative Contestation and Other Ideas of Human Right
In addition to institutional decline and retrenchment of rights, the greatest shift in human rights agenda has been the appearance of alternative normative approaches that undermine liberal universality. The emerging powers are more and more espousing readings of human rights that focus on economic advancement, common good, and cultural distinctiveness. These stories are not anti-human rights, only they rearrange their priorities in a manner to relegate civil and political freedom in favor of stability and expansion. This culture of norm change has been strengthened by cooperation, development financing and diplomatic coalitions that give less reliance to the Western dominated institutions. According to scholars, these arrangements undercut the bargaining power of the conventional human rights conditionalities and allow states to look for the other ways of governing that do not follow liberalism at substantial costs (Acharya, 2019). The consequence is the pluralized human rights discourse where each of the competing interpretations exists side by side, and there is no effective means to solve it most of the time. Most importantly, this pluralism will question the belief that the human rights norms automatically spread as a result of persuasion and institutionalization. Instead, norms are becoming more and more influenced by the relations of power, the strategic interests and ideological competition. This fact poses basic questions on the future of universality, as human rights are incorporated in competing conceptions of world order, and not a common moral and ethical paradigm.

Strategic Selectivity and the Politicization of Human Rights

The human rights advocacy in a multipolar world has become highly characterized by a selective strategy. States are interested in the promotion of rights, but only in the cases when it is consistent with geopolitical interests and ignore violations by allies or other partners of economic importance. This partial interaction weakens the authority of the discourse of human rights and strengthens the sense of dualism standards, especially among the states of the Global South. Experimental evidence indicates that this kind of politicization corrosively affects the level of trust in international institutions and undermines transnational advocacy attempts because local actors no longer trust external assistance that does not seem to be chronically or instrumentally linked to those activities. The current trend of erosion in principled leadership and emergence of transactional diplomacy in turn leads to a greater legitimacy crisis in the human rights regime.

Combined, all these changes suggest that human rights, as an agenda, are not just weakened in the twenty first century, but changed. It operates within a contested normative environment shaped by shifting power relations, institutional fragility, and competing visions of global order. The following section examines how these structural changes manifest in concrete practices, focusing on the interaction between power politics and human rights implementation across security, economic, and environmental domains.

Interactions Between Power Shifts and Human Rights Practice

The implications of power changes in the world on human rights can be observed best not in the abstract standards of human rights, but in the daily activities of upholding, disregarding, and transgressing of human rights. With the spread of power that is more contested, human rights have to be enacted in strategies of calculation, institutional and institutional limits, imbalances in dependencies among states. This part examines the role played by the change in power relationships on the practice of human rights in three related spheres, security and conflict governance, political economy and development, and climate change, which show that human rights are becoming more and more dependent on geopolitical location rather than on duty.

Politics of Power, Struggle, and Selective Guard of Privileges

Although armed conflict is one of the worst setups within the context of human rights violation, the manner in which the international community responds to human rights crisis is immensely influenced by the politics of power. In the modern world system, unified action against mass crimes is often limited by competition between the world super powers especially in the United Nations Security Council. Veto politics, strategic coalition and conflicting regional interests usually lead to sluggish or watered down responses and erode the duty to defend framework and compromise the normative dedication to civilian security. Recent controversies depict the geopolitical alignment that defines the exposure and the level of prioritization on human right violation. According to the scholars, actions of strategically important states, or their allies, are more prone to being minimized or repackaged as internal security issues, whereas comparable violations by their rivals are more likely to be intensely reported internationally (Bellamy, 2023). Such partial application undermines the legitimacy of the international humanitarian and human rights law which strengthens the view that the norms are tertiary to power. These dynamics are further represented in peace keeping and post conflict reconstruction. The constraints to the ability of the peace operations to protect the civilians effectively are lack of funding, onerous mandates, and the existence of a hostile host state. With the bigger powers seeking bilateral or regional security agreements the multilateral systems are finding it more difficult to stamp their feet and despite the isolated parts of human rights protection observed throughout conflict-affected regions.

Politics, Economy and Conditionality in a Multipolar World

The relation between development assistance and human rights has also changed due to the global power changes. Over the period of the Western dominance, the economic aid and trade agreements

were often accompanied by the rules of governance reform and right observance, which, however, were not always consistent. The availability of alternative sources of funds and investment in the present multipolar environment has diminished the leverage of the traditional donors giving the recipient states an opportunity to escape the conditionality of human rights without facing much of economic cost.   Researchers observe that infrastructure led models of development, in its various forms, especially those related to emerging powers, gives priority to state led development and political stability rather than participatory and inclusive governance and civil liberties (Hurrell, 2023). Though these models have reduced poverty and expanded economies in certain settings, in most cases they strengthen elite dominance and restrict civic space with long term consequences on social and political rights. Meanwhile, the instability in the global economy and unpredictability of the market contribute to additional vulnerabilities of human rights, especially in the Global South. Sometimes the abuse of labor rights, dispossession of land, and environmental destruction are defended on the basis of development needs, which is a general drift toward more utilitarian definitions of rights. There exists insufficient accountability where big economic players with easy access to cross jurisdictional worlds are enabled by the lack of coordinated global standards, which also illustrates how the practice of economic power is dependent upon human rights.

Powers, Climate Change, and Vulnerability of Rights
Climate change is a crucial venue whereby power translocation across the globe collides with human rights in an intricate and most of the times non-equivalent manner. Whereas the vulnerable populations are disproportionately exposed to climate related harms, the ability to mitigate and be able to adapt to environmental risk is unevenly spread across states. Power asymmetries also influence the way of responsibility is distributed as well as access to resources, whereby the more powerful and wealthier states are in a better position to protect themselves against the brunt of the consequences at the expense of the less powerful subject. These inequalities can be seen in the international climate negotiations, where obligations are undermined through tactical bargaining and national interest. Researchers state that the inability to incorporate the notion of human rights into climate governance structures partly comes as a result of power-motivated unwillingness to make the pledge of being bound by the requirements that may restrict economic empowerment or geopolitical rivalry (Sultana, 2022). Because of it, the problem of climate-induced displacement, food insecurity, and health risks is not fully addressed in the current human rights framework. Besides, the projects of climate adaptation and mitigation themselves may create new rights issues, especially when they are undertaken without significant involvement or protection. Land displacement and marginalization of the local communities have been linked to large scale renewable energy and infrastructure projects, which have usually been funded by influential external forces. Such consequences highlight the role of the environmental governance in reproducing the preexisting inequalities when power is used instead of the rights-based principles in shaping the environmental governance.

Transnational Advocacy, Civil Society and the Shrinking Space
The viability of the civil society and transnational advocacy networks is also important in the practice of human rights protection. The changes in global power, however, have helped to make a civic space narrow in that states are using restrictive laws, surveillance technologies and discourse of national security to curtail dissent. It has been normalized in the global governance institutions, which have eroded international backing of the civil society actors. Transnational advocacy groups are under more and more pressure in regard to funding, accessibility, and legitimacy especially in situations where governments define human rights activism as interference of foreign country. In fact, according to scholars, the decline of principled multilateralism diminishes the means of protection to the local activist, exposing them to repression and does not provide international means of its struggle (Keck and Sikkink, 2021). Nevertheless, the issue of

civil society is very important as a place of resistance and adaptation to these difficulties. The relevance of even more hostile structural conditions of advocacy suggests new types of digital activism, cooperation, and issue specific coalitions. The efficiency of such actions, though, is getting increasingly influenced by the larger power context in which it is acting.

Critical Analysis and Argumentation

The above discussion has shown that there is no marginalization of global powers to the human rights agenda, but is rather part of its modern character. This part proposes a critical thesis that shifting balance of power in the twenty first century has redefined human rights as a somewhat coherent normative undertaking to its components of a fragmented and strategically mediated space. Instead of indicating the breakdown of human rights, this rearrangement denotes a more fundamental structural rearrangement wherein norms are more and more configured by power asymmetries, institutional rivalry, as well as ideological pluralism. Another key inference of multipolarity is that it undermines normative hierarchy. In dominating periods, the strong players had the ability and authority to stipulate something acceptable in behavior and the ability to mobilize power to the advantage of factoring enforcing mechanisms but selectively. The present world system does not allow any actor or coalition to have a universal definition of human rights. Consequently, norms are more and more exposed to negotiation, redefinition and dilution. Although this pluralism might seem more accommodating, it tends to put in advantageous positions strong players who are able to influence results via institutional power and any other strategic alliance that leaves a vulnerable population with fewer means of protection. Most importantly, the weakening of Western dominance has revealed the instrumental pillars, on which a lot of the human rights regime was based. The belief that the codification of the law and moral persuasion could be used to maintain rights protection and protection underestimated the fact that norms had relied on power supported enforcement. With the emergent powers challenging liberal conceptions of human rights, they demonstrate the politics of constructing norms and make demands on universality. It does not necessarily undermine human rights, but requires more forthrightness concerning the place of power in enforcing normative commitments. The alternative aspect of this change that is important is the increasing conflict between collective and individual rights conception. Other models of governance are focused on development, stability and social order, and tends to formulate these purposes in advance human dignity. Although these arguments have the echo of such situations in contexts defined by poverty and insecurity, there are chances of derailing civil and political liberties to the will of state establishment. The main problem is whether the legitimate development issues and protection against authoritarian abuse can be balanced without strong mechanisms of international accountants, especially in the situation when no strong international accountants exist. Human rights are also politicized, thus making advocacy and enforcement more difficult. The tactics of selective interaction, as well as cloudy enigma deter confidence in international institutions and erode transnational cohesion. The moral force of rights can be discussed as undermined where they are mostly applied as a tool of competition due to which they can be abandoned. This is particularly harmful to civil society actors whose credibility and even security rely on the international assistance being constant. Meanwhile, analytically, it would be inadequate to describe the point of time as only that of degradation. Human rights practice can also become innovative and diversified because of the power diffusion. Other avenues of promoting norms include regional mechanisms, issue specific coalitions, and cooperation though not to the same extent. The problem facing the academia and practitioners is the way to find ways of coping with the multipolar realities without sacrificing fundamental ideals of dignity, equality, and accountability. In the end, the main point of the argument that is critical in this context argues that human rights should not be reinstated to one overarching hegemonic system but rather to be reconstructed through inclusive, context, and power sensitive policies. This has to recognize

normative contestation but to be able to resist the process of normalizing repression in the name of sovereignty or development.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the connection between shifts in global power and changes at the human rights agenda in the twenty first century by positing that the current changes in the balance of power actually redefined the normative, institutional, and practical aspects of human rights governance. The switch to more of a multipolar and confrontational world system as opposed to a much more Western dominated order has undermined enforcement regimes, broken normative solidarity, and has facilitated the development of other conceptualizations of rights that disrupt liberal universalism. The paper has demonstrated through theoretical discussion and empirical evidence that human rights are getting institutionalized in geopolitical rivalry as opposed to being enforced as global agreements. The refusal of Western leadership, the emergence of other forms of governance, and dispersion of the power to regional actors have all turned the human rights regime, which has been rather a centralized one, into a bargaining and lopsided topography. This transformation has far reached ramifications to accountability especially to vulnerable groups where their safety is pegged on consistent and upright international interaction. Meanwhile, the analysis warns against conclusions made deterministically. Human rights have not vanished in the world politics and have not yet lost all normative relevance. Rather, they act in a more disruptive context in which they have to act and think in an adaptive way and seek critical reflections. The future issue lies in how to bridge the normative aspiration and geopolitical reality and be able to create mechanisms that can afford the rights protection without the involvement of the hegemonic protection. This means to scholars that power analysis should be brought more directly into the human rights theory. To policymakers and practitioners, it requires fresh dedication to institutional change, transnational partnership, and funding the civil society, especially in situations where state authority is centralized and the rule lacks transparency. Research needs to be further developed in the future to understand the intersection of such new matters as digital governance, climate displacement, and global inequality with power transitions and define the next stage of the human rights agenda.

Finally, the transformation of world order does not make human rights outdated, it only demands reconsideration of the way in which they are formulated, justified and embedded in the institutions. It is the challenge of facing realities of power that will ensure that the human rights project is relevant and resilient in the twenty first century.

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