

FUTURISTIC POLITICS IN ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Asia is known for its vastness, beautiful terrain, and population. Diversity in terms of culture, religion, and political systems is the hallmark of its existence. Regional integration, which is an emerging trend in the global age, has been only witnessed in its different regions but no major effort has been made to integrate the whole continent as is the case with Americas, Africa or Europe. There are forums on various pertaining issues such as the ASEAN and SAARC, and SCO emphasizing on the integration of sub-regions of Far East, Central Asia, and South Asia respectively but only with limited or closed memberships. A regional inclusive body like EU is not in the sight. Divergence in racial, cultural and linguistic terms is one thing non-similarity in terms of political systems is yet another reason for their not becoming closer to each other. Some practice socialism while others remain tied to capitalism. Still, there are others which retain authoritarian structures.

Diversity, which is the hallmark of the Asian continent, has also been witnessed through the stages of development in various countries and regions. We find states like Japan, South Korea, and China using hi-tech systems of economic development and, hence, shown great potential to lead the rest. On the other side of the divide is the vast array of states which strive to cater to the basic necessities of life to their populace. Yet there are emerging economies like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka showing vast potential to attract foreign investment to scale up the ladder of development. There is something called Asian Dilemma, whereby states are caught in the cobweb of hostilities due to geographical factors or legacies of the past. However, there are growing signs of integrating the Asian Continent despite all oddities. China has taken the lead to promote connectivity between South Asia and Central Asia to link it up with Europe.

Asian Development Bank has undertaken the project of connecting the Far East with Europe through a network of rails and roads. There has been the talk of creating a fiscal union and opting for the single currency. The move towards integration may owe a lot to technological advances like telephony, the internet, and satellite TV and there is no dearth of whistleblowers like China or Japan to use the modern tools of communication to integrate Asian economies. As for hurdles to regional integration, it is very underdevelopment which marks the existence of Asia as a whole: while various countries will be helped for uplift they will have to upgrade their political systems and in this process may be poles apart by upheavals like populism and extremism. Is it necessary, then, to have a political leader to show a path to stability? Probably, Asia will require something new to reconcile politics with economic growth rather than one or the other country to dictate the rest on the path of reason. It is not socialism or capitalism but a scientific system of economic management that may do wonders for Asia.

INTRODUCTION

The generic trend of politics in Asia is taking a drastic change. Asia being the largest continent of the world, is culturally, religiously and politically diverse which makes the sum greater than the parts. The changing power axis from America-centric to Asia-centric has sparked hope for many whereas resentment can also be observed. It is a norm to have mixed reactions which are vital components of the healthy competition. The political scenario is no different than the basics of sport which is why many political experts around the globe declared politics as 'participatory sport' which requires an amalgamation of all generations and the representative from the youth, middle aged and the elderly is essential. At present, the politics in Asia is on the axis of change which is why, for many the present political situation may be disappointing, rather highly disappointing but the future is bright where all the pieces of the puzzle will fall back into the right place. The beauty of politics in Asia is that each cluster of countries which have similar historical and cultural roots are facing more or less the same issues. The Central Asian Republics (CARs), South Asia and Far East Asia are not only culturally diverse but are known for political diversity as well. If a holistic perspective is studied, then, Asia is taking the command and will soon be the headquarters of global politics as increased collaborations of China and Russia can be observed. This collaboration of world's largest countries does not mean that it is a positive or negative indicator, rather it is changing the trends and change is good as it keeps things moving. Asia is home to countries where traditional mindsets are dominant in running the politics and economy whereas moving on

towards the Far East, conquer of technology to the extent of artificial intelligence taking over human capacity can be observed. It will not be wrong to predict that in near future, political decisions will involve a large extent of artificial intelligence input. There is a definite indication of the rise of the emerging powers of the region which are all set to conquer the world's top economic and financial listings. As the analysts and experts predict, by 2050 the top world powers will include most of the countries from the Asia for instance China, India, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Japan and Saudi Arabia. Should the western powers worry? This may be an alarm for many. The political dimensions are certainly expected to change with the change agents of Asia. Having multiple factors at its advantage, the exploitation of the same factors will make the political environment of Asia the most dynamic, state of the art and highly integrated with other aspects such as the economy.

What Makes Asia: Central Asia, South Asia, and the Far-East Asia

The beauty of Asia is that it cannot be studied as a holistic chapter, as the vastness and massiveness suggests the economists and political analysts to divide the continent based on its geographical similarities. Asia is not only culturally and geographically diverse rather the political structures and beliefs also change across the regions. However, as the political trends of the Central Asia, South Asia, the Gulf States and the Far East are studied, then one comes across a diverse array of power structures which includes the constitutional monarchies, one-party states, absolute monarchies, federal states, liberal democracies, dependent territories, and military dictatorships, all under one roof of Asia. Asia is still home to the state enmities such as between India and Pakistan, and South Korea and North Korea, whereas, Kashmir is the disputed territory since the British left the sub-continent, and Palestine is in a constant battle field. The Gulf States which includes Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait United Arab Emirates (UAE), also known as the Persian Gulf, are home to the oldest civilizations of the world where the first constituencies of politics were practiced, whereas, on the other hand, the Central Asian Republics are relatively newer countries which were born after the breakdown of the Soviet Union (Badan). The Central Asian States have mostly been governed under the refined forms of dictatorship. Further to it, the implications of the cold war led to ruffled ties of many Asian countries with Russia, however, now the ice is seen melting which is a step forward for the regional integration plans of China. The 'One Belt, One Road' and the '21st Century Maritime Silk Route' initiative rolled by China has been welcomed by all, as it gives immense opportunities to the participating countries to develop their economic infrastructures. Whereas, one must not forget that it has been one of the greatest political diplomacy games played in the history of politics which has not only assisted in streamlining the economies but have also opened up a new chapter in the course of the financial-political arena. Russia being the largest country in the continent has also taken a proactive approach contrary to the diplomatic policies of the USA. Russia acknowledges the fact that Asia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, therefore, blaming them for any radicalization is not the right move as it will just aggravate the situation. Russia has opened up doors of diplomacy especially with the Muslim world, contrary to the recent change of policies at the Washington.

Each region has its peculiar strengthens, the Central Asian states which came into existence after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, underwent the rule of dictatorship, which did not allow them to explore the world markets and make its space until now as survival was the foremost priority. The recent changes and the shift to democracy in these republics have paved the way for a new era of economic development through regional integration. These countries have rich mineral and natural resource deposits and are able to meet the region's energy requirements through gas and electricity production. The countries struggling with energy demand and supply deficit are now relying on the landlocked Central Asian Republics with hopes to indulge in bilateral agreements of trade and transit deals. The political systems are derived from the Russian rule but at present these countries have relatively newer political institutions which are evolving after facing the general issues pertaining to governance. Chances are, that with the pursuance of regional economic activity, political maturity will also develop which will assist in eliminating the governance issues (Demchenko 64-80) .

The Gulf States have already been credited with fulfilling the world's oil demand and regulating the supply to a certain extent. The war on terror in Iraq and global economic slowdown resulted in surging oil prices which made fuel one of the most expensive commodity until recent when the economic activity regained its pace. Apart from being home to the Islamic civilization, the Gulf States enjoy the rule of the monarchy where the royal families are running the state affairs. There has not yet been an outcry for democracy as the people seem to be happy and satisfied with their leaders. However, Iraq was under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussain, and his tenure is often referred as a chaotic one which destabilized peace within the Gulf States. However, since after the US-led war in Iraq, the country has been facing severe governance issues and its relevant practices in

the country with a high incident of corruption and terrorism. However, the political scenario of Gulf has never restricted any economic development rather these countries have been one of the most active investors and business groups around the globe. Apart from that Turkey, Georgia, Iran, and Yemen, are the countries which are not categorized in any subgroup, but recently these countries have also emerged with an increased political and economic stability. Turkey is the only secular state which has kept up with the democratic practices in the country since long. Apart from that, the political maturity has led to the development of economic perspectives which is expected to yield a positive outcome in the near future as Turkey is also expected to take the lead as one of the top emerging countries.



Figure 1: Map of Asia, Clustered on basis of sub-regions

The South Asia has been an advocate of democracy whereas India has only been able to maintain an exemplary democratic state. There is no doubt that the incidents of corruption are extremely high in this region as the good governance is hardly found. Pakistan and Bangladesh have undergone military rule due to the political instabilities and lack of adherence to the constitution. The analyst and experts often refer to this region as highly dependent on the foreign aid due to the prevailing socio-economic issues and incapability of the leaderships to strengthen the respective economies coupled with issues like population explosion, high poverty index, lack of quality education and etc., (Nasrat 167-170). Nonetheless, as the current political dynamics are studied, these regions are emerging as one of the most powerful countries due to the factors such as increased awareness of the locals, enhanced political knowledge, and the increasing will to impart good governance and make the political systems sustainable. The strategic linkages with the regional powers are also taking a positive shape as Russia and China are being looked up to as the new unannounced powers in the geopolitical arena.

Moving towards the Far East, countries like Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia have been true advocates of democracy which can be observed through their well-established institutions and the respect for the constitution. The political maturity is one of the reasons that these countries have exceptionally developed economies as the investors' confidence was never shaken. Apart from that, Far East has its own share of

instability as well in the shape of poor governance systems and the authoritarian leadership style. China's growing influence and development in the China Sea have also caused a fissure within the neighboring states which is creating political constraints. Chances are that the foreign hands are highlighting and emphasizing this issue so that any arbitration efforts may not materialize and China loses its rights on the sea.

Geo-Political Environment on the Whole

The Asians are advocates of democracy and free speech, however, the military rule is seen powerful in many countries which emerged due to the weak governance by the political elite. In many instances, the military was forced to take over the governance due to the corrupt, weak and self-centered policies of the politicians as seen in the case of Pakistan whereas in other instances the military leaders misused their powers to reign the country. There is no denying to the fact that Asia has some of the world's best politicians who have excelled in their field. President Putin is the most admired president in the history of Russia whereas President Xi Jinping's diplomacy spheres made China welcomed by all not only in Asia but in Europe as well. India is also credited with well-developed democratic systems which have never failed. The future of politics is bright in Asia, due to the pertaining facts that will not only shape up the political infrastructure but will also groom the future world leaders. Asia has the highest ratio of youth due to the population explosion. This is one of the reasons that the economic centers shifted to this region due to the abundance of unexplored natural resources and profusion of human capital. This is further creating exposure and opportunities in the political fields and the youth is seen highly involved in all spheres of politics who want the best democratic practices in their respective countries. Some countries have well-developed democratic institutions whereas the others are in the process of developing. The participation in formal training and education is increasing in all fields and political education has become one of the most preferred fields of study. Involvement of youth at United Nations Model platforms is increasing which is grooming representatives for the highly integrated forums such as the SAARC, SCO, ECO and ASEAN whereas the list is increasing as the regional cooperation blocs are gaining momentum. China has taken the lead and has introduced regional integration initiative which will link the Central Asia with the South Asia and further link these regions with the Far East Asia. Asia has stepped into a new era of regional and economic collaboration which has led to increased geographical associations amongst the countries, rather it will be rightly put that the economic and regional amalgamation is only possible due to the political and diplomatic extension of ties. An interesting phenomenon is also being observed and that is the increased military collaborations and it is predicted that in future a combined force parallel to NATO may rise in Asia with the objectives to sustain peace and stability in the region. Whereas on the other hand, the extensive collaborations at political followed by economic sector may lead to a stronger union which may surpass the European Union as well, which will allow visa-free traveling and introduction of one currency will replace local currencies. (Antlöv and Ngo).

Traditional Versus Technological

Japan, South Korea, and China have highly advanced technology systems which are not only able to assist in the economic progression rather the development of artificial intelligence has better equipped the humans with exceptional thinking processes and information vital for taking well-informed decisions. The way various threats are managed by these highly advanced countries is mind boggling as compared to the developing countries of Asia. Artificial intelligence has slowly yet successfully made its way into fields other than business development which is why now the technologically advanced countries are enjoying in the shape of high economies of scale and reduced wastage. The developing countries are still relying on the traditional means of information and political scenario is highly dependent on the traditional sources of information where the newspaper takes the lead. However, there is also an interesting trend, Asia continent is home to almost half of the world's population and the population of developed as well as the developing countries especially the youth, which comprise a major proportion of the population, are highly skilled in the fields of information technology (IT) especially software development. The internet has assisted in shaping the region's politics as online forums, chat rooms, observation cells, subject blogging and other websites such as the Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have given a new meaning to the politics. The population from the developing countries have also started showing active presence on these social IT forums to attract their voter base and to spread their message and wider agendas. Unfortunately, in few countries the Social media is restricted and highly regulated by the government institutions in fears it will create anti-state and anti-government sentiments. In the future, technology is definitely going to take over and elevate the continent's political scenario, as

FaceTime came to rescue the democracy in the recent attempt of a military coup in Turkey. Similarly, the social media has been seen as an effective tool in highlighting the social issues which had never been addressed before. Even the most underdeveloped countries of the continent such as the Afghanistan, Yemen, and Myanmar have seen a technological surge where the locals are raising their voices especially in the political arena, therefore, it is easy to conclude that technological advancements are replacing the traditional political environment which carries multiple benefits as transparency and accountability increases.

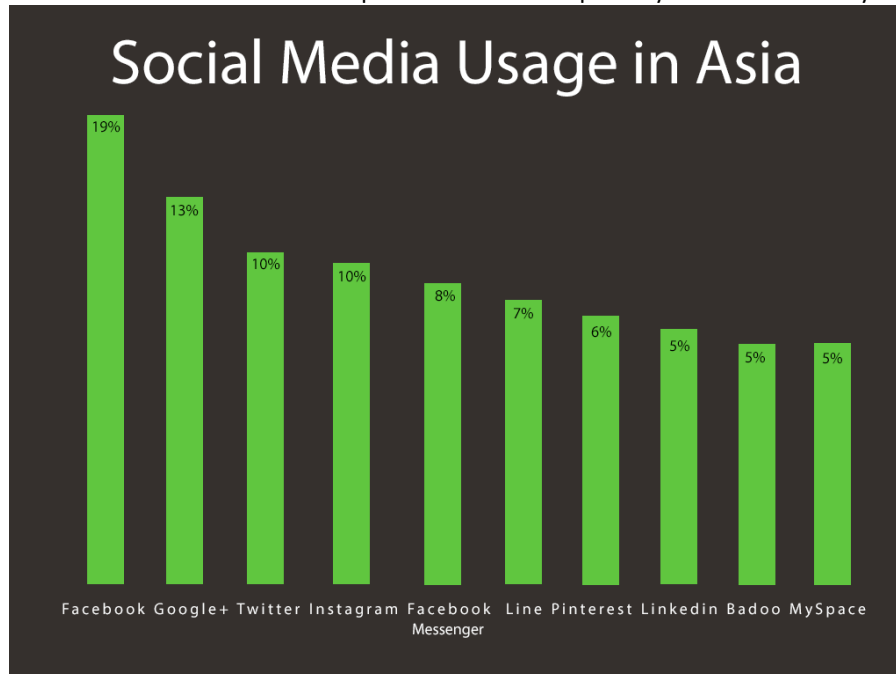


Figure 2: Popular Social Media Sites/ Apps used in Asia

Emerging Powers from the Region

The change of power axis towards Asia is evident where China is declared as the unopposed winner. There is no doubt that India wanted and is still pursuing the dream to become the regional power, however, the current circumstances depict a contrary picture as so far India has not been able to achieve a breakthrough in attaining any massive scale project in the grand Chinese dream. The idea of regional integration and making Asia the economic hub of the globe has further escalated the economic tendencies of the developing countries and in all probabilities most of the countries making to the top of the list will belong to the Asia. Most surprisingly these countries are present-day developing countries which will reign over the global economy in the next upcoming years. Now there is a far greater role of politics in this situation, as political hostilities will lead to isolation whereas political openness as seen in the case of Maldives and Sri Lanka, will yield tremendous positive outcomes (Christensen and Li). As the global trends have taken a new dimension, therefore, in the future, the economic powers will be declared as the political leaders of the world as well. Unfortunately, Asia had long been jumbled in the web of the Asian dilemmas where the past legacies were too hostile to bring in a change, however, a forward step turned out to be the game changer in this region that has alarmed the western powers to a greater extent which they never foresaw. As the future predictions are evaluated with the current happening trends, eight of the fifteen top emerging countries belong to Asia where the countries located at the Asian side will attain benefit mostly due to their geostrategic location coupled with their respective competitive advantage in shape of being blessed with certain natural resources which are becoming scarce around the world.

PPP rank	2014		2050	
	Country	GDP at PPP (2014 US\$bn)	Country	Projected GDP at PPP (2014 US\$bn)
1	China	17,632	China	61,079
2	United States	17,416	India	42,205
3	India	7,277	United States	41,384
4	Japan	4,788	Indonesia	12,210
5	Germany	3,621	Brazil	9,164
6	Russia	3,559	Mexico	8,014
7	Brazil	3,073	Japan	7,914
8	France	2,587	Russia	7,575
9	Indonesia	2,554	Nigeria	7,345
10	United Kingdom	2,435	Germany	6,338
11	Mexico	2,143	United Kingdom	5,744
12	Italy	2,066	Saudi Arabia	5,488
13	South Korea	1,790	France	5,207
14	Saudi Arabia	1,652	Turkey	5,102
15	Canada	1,579	Pakistan	4,253

Figure 3: The Emerging Powers in 2050

New Trends: Whistleblowing

The world politics has seen a new phenomenon of the whistleblowers who have turned the tables around on many pertinent and sensitive issues. The information leaked by Edward Snowden, Assange Julian, and the Panama Leaks jolted the world political leaders and affirmed many that the truth cannot remain hidden for too long. The political leaders, who also happen to constitute the world's elite families and the sensitive agencies are now well aware that they are playing with fire as the technological advancements have given the strength to a common man to reveal or hold any information at any given time. The world financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank and so on, are now all are at threat of the whistleblowers and therefore precaution is being taken more than ever. However, apart from the regular media channels such as the investigative journalism and special programs aired on channels highlighting pertinent issues on matters related to good governance, whistleblowing has been used extensively to reveal information and actions of the world's elite and political groups. This has further assisted China to take the driving seat and derive benefits for itself through rolling the idea of regional economic integration. Panama Leaks have been the largest whistleblowing incident of this century which mostly targeted the political elite of the globe. As the people refused to accept the corrupt political leaders in Europe, a similar trend is taking pace in Asia, where the locals are demanding a trial of the political elite accused of tax evasion and money laundering. As the voice of common man cannot be ignore in this revolutionized era, chances are that no politician will be able to get rid of these allegations easily as compared to the past. Panama leaks have generated a global uproar which has become out of control and the people are angry, especially the tax payers, as they want justice to be served.

Populism and Extremism

The countries like Thailand and Philippines have seen a movement towards populism, however, the analysts have declared it as a failed attempt as, despite the alluring features of populism, the traditional mindset in politics is still dominant in these countries. The rising youth is seen more in favor of the ideological values taught by populism. They want a common man to be empowered and to be able to influence the decision makers on an equality basis, therefore, populism did not succeed in the first attempt, but it has the potential to reemerge in the future. Analysts also predict that populism may also take pace in the Central Asian Republics and South Asia. The traces of populism are certainly there, nonetheless, the majority still favors democracy and many want that to be the only chosen way of the political system in any country. On the other hand, at a broader perspective, Asia is mainly an underdeveloped region which has faced its own share of social issues and political instabilities, whereas the lack of attention and resources led these unaddressed issues to further aggravate which has now taken the shape of extremism on the continent. At present Asia is being labeled as the home of the Jihadist and terrorist organizations which includes the Al-Qaeda, Taliban and the Islamic State (ISIS). There is no doubt that the presence and terrorist related incidents are at peak in Asia which has distorted the normal life in countries of Asia, but there is more to the story. The political clashes, instabilities and lack of attention are the main reasons behind the growth of such destructive groups who are being financed and trained by the foreign hands who do not want to see a progressive and peaceful Asia (Elstein). Asia was the first country which was hit by the backlash of war against terror initiated by the United States of America. Afghanistan, once a modern state is back to square one, whereas Pakistan suffered the wrath of Taliban after becoming an ally of the USA. Indonesia, being one of the victims as the Bali attacks claimed lives of many foreigners, devised proactive strategies to conquer the threats of terrorism. Whereas countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines are currently on high alert as the security agencies still need to devise foolproof strategies. However, as the security analyst give their verdict regarding the future, they believe that the future is not bleak as the increasing political and military interactions at various cooperation and forums will yield a productive result where these forces will not only devise the integrated combat strategies but it will also be a step forward for the political leaders to take responsibility and adopt integrative practices which will be in favor of the region on the whole rather than pursuing their individualistic aims and objectives (Henderson 180-191).

Will the Economic Giant be the Political Leader?

There is no doubt that the political competitiveness is expected to intensify which is going to be a game changer in the continent. The discussion that China is aiming to become the new world supreme power is an old one, which lacks significant related information and facts. The truth is that the new era is of integration irrespective if it is political, economic, and regional or security. One country is not going to rule anymore, rather support from the sum is going to further select the ultimate representative at the global platform which is why an intense struggle is seen in devising diplomacy strategies and increasing the circle of allies rather than relying on few. The one with the most allies wins the race. China is no doubt the initiator of the regional economic integration, however, without the support of the participating countries in the grand plan, China would have failed to acquire this status. As information horizons broaden, a reconciliation between politics and economy will be seen emerging, therefore the futuristic politics in Asia will not be based on political power or the economic advantage, rather it is going to be the sum of both devised through a scientific approach to link all sectors so that maximum benefit can be derived (Esanov 28-30). There is no doubt that the developed countries are coming forward to assist and uplift the underdeveloped countries through project initiatives which will help elevate the economies but at the same time, individual participation and commitment from these developing countries is also required towards the common goal. If we suggest that China will lead, then it will only happen if the other countries of the continent decide to support the Chinese stance. The growth of pro-India inclination is also rising especially in the Gulf States and the Central Asian Republics. Whoever comes up at the top, will have to take all in the same boat for a win-win situation.

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