

The World in the 21st Century and Beyond: Convergence or Invariance

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Abstract : There is an on-going debate among intellectuals and scholars of international relations and world politics over the direction which the world is heading particularly in the current era of globalization. On the one hand are adherents to the convergence thesis which is premised on the assumption that global social order is tending toward universalism which could translate into the possible end of the classical state system and the unification of world societies under a single and common ideological dispensation. The convergence thesis is hinged on the globalization process which is gradually reducing world societies into a 'global village'. On the other hand are intellectuals who hold the view that despite advances made in communication technology which appear to threaten the survival of the classical state system. Invariance, as expressed in the survival of the existing state system and the diverse social traditions in world societies, remain a realistic possibility contrary to the conclusions of the convergence thesis. The invariance thesis has been advanced by scholars like Samuel P. Huntington whose work on clash of civilizations suggests that world peace can only be sustained through the co-habitation of diverse civilizations across the world. The purpose of this paper is to examine both sides of the debate with the aim of making a realistic assessment on where world societies are headed, between convergence and invariance. Using the realist theory of international relations as our theoretical premise the paper argues that while there is sufficient ground to predict the future direction of world societies as headed towards some form of convergence, invariance as expressed in the co-existence of diverse civilizations will for a long time remain a major feature of the international system.

Keywords : convergence, invariance, clash of civilization, classical state system, universalism

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