

# Three Different Perspectives On The Role Of The Nation-State In Today's Globalized World

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## Abstract

The role of the nation state in the globalization process is one of the important issues in the literature of globalization in sociology. The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of nation state under the light of three different perspectives: globalist, skeptic or traditionalist and post skeptic or transformational. The article is a critique of these three waves affecting globalization theory. While each theory has weak and strong directions, the third way, post skeptic perspective illustrates the picture of the link between nation state and globalization in a more comprehensive manner.

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**Keywords:** Globalization, Nation State, Region State

## Introduction

Globalization has become a worldwide phenomenon that has cultural, political, economic, and social dimensions. As such, globalization has yielded many consequences that clearly affect people's lives across the world in many ways. While there have been various reports describing the many different consequences of globalization, one of the most significant consequences, is undoubtedly, the effective introduction of transnational institutions, the changing structure of the nation state, and the diminished sovereignty of national agencies (Robinson 2007). In addition, although it has been debated whether the nation state and globalization are conflicting phenomena in the process of globalization, different point of views, stating that the nation state is a still major player in globalization era, can be identified in the globalization literature (Robertson and White 2007).

In this regard, the role of the nation state in the globalization process has led to many questions, such as "is the nation state being undermined?" "has it retained its primacy?" or "is it becoming transformed in new ways?"(Robinson 2007, p. 2).To address these questions, it would appear highly beneficial to examine the role of the nation state in the context of globalization theories. That is, it seems possible we can obtain a better understanding of the relationship between globalization and the role of

nation state by examining three different well accepted theoretical perspectives of globalization (Martell 2007). The first perspective is that of the globalists who argue that the world is on its way to a form of global governance, rather than a system the governance by powerful nation states (Martell, 2010a). The second is the perspective of the skeptics who assert that nation states are shaping the nature of world politics. In addition, regional blocs and internationalism can better reflect the real picture (Martell, 2010a). Last, but not least, are the transformationalists or post-skeptics who seek to present the middle ground between the globalists and skeptics (Martell 2010b). They argue that while there are still nation states that exist in the context of world politics, their structures are different from what they were, and the effect of globalization on nation states is irrefutable (Martell 2007).

### **Globalist Perspective**

According to the (hyper) globalist approach, the role of the nation state is diminished by the existence of international organizations such as the United Nations and the International Monetary fund (IMF) or by social movements (Martell 2010a). In particular, three big economic organizations, which are the IMF, the World Bank, and the General Agreement and Tariff and Trade (GATT) organizations, have created a new economic order, which must be obeyed by nation states (Thomas 2007). On the other hand, both skeptics and transformationalists argue that the nation state is a still major player in world politics, and oppose the globalist view point, where globalists believe that the role of nation state in the global era has become limited (Jones 2010).

From the economic vantage point, with its neo liberal policies, including privatization and strong sense of capitalism, the supranational organizations such as the IMF and World Bank have diminished the role of the nation state as well as the idea of welfare state (Oberoi 2010). In doing so, social and labour market policies have changed, resulting in weaker nation states (Dreher and Gaston 2007). In addition, according to Oberoi (2010), the welfare state has been transformed into a “competition state”, as a result of the integration of the global system. The appropriate model for this form of nation state is the competition state model, where the nation state is changed from that of a national and comprehensive government to a “less interventionist” and “small government” form (Oberoi 2010)

Peet and Hartwick (2009) propose that national states will eventually vanish, and will not transform any kind of structure in the future. As this process unfolds, national borders will become more complex than those presently in place as technological progress produces new kinds of trade forms such as those that benefit from online markets. In addition, this newly

constructed entity will result in a totally different kind of state, and international economic institutions will have the ability to affect most national economies, except for small numbers of countries that are not integrated into the international structure (Peet and Hartwick 2009).

Another globalist, Ohmae (1993) discusses the importance of the region state rather than the nation state. For Ohmae, economic activities help to frame political issues. That is, the nation state is not successful at managing economic problems. The nation state is designed to deal with “ethnic tensions,” “religious hatred,” and “political resentment.” On the other hand, region states such as those of Seattle-Vancouver, Silicon Valley, Hong Kong, Northern Italy, and San Diego-Tijuana aim at more foreign investment, foreign ownership, and the marketing of foreign products. According to Ohmae, the nation state is not rational, and is not open to global realities.

Similar to Ohmae, Saskie Sassen (1996) proposes that sub-national components such as regional states or global cities will force national states to assume a different state form in the future. That is to say, globalization and neo liberal approaches all over the world require market-centered policies, not state centered policies. Moreover, Martin Wolf (1997), one of the eminent globalists, argues that economic isolation of a nation state results in disappointing economic outcomes such as those observed in North Korea, and East Germany. In the global era, for Wolf, nation states have to be open to joining the world economy and international organizations if they want to be strong states.

In sum, the globalists’ perspective dominantly depends on economic approaches. For them, transnational organizations diminish the role of the nation state, and global governance will become the last frontier, as regards the role of nation state.

### **Skeptic Perspective**

Skeptics believe that globalization is not a new process, but an ongoing form of internationalization. Therefore, for them, the nation state is growing, and we can see this form of growth occurring in the future based on current historical data and related linear trends. In this respect, skeptics’ consistently present empirical evidence that indicates that the role of the nation state is still alive and its borders are effective (Martell 2007). In addition, the nation state is still one of the major players, considering globalization (Thomas 2007). North America and Europe countries can be accepted as powerful nation states (Martell 2007). In addition, skeptics argue that the organs of the United Nations (UN) are instruments of powerful nation states and are designed to achieve their political aims (Martell 2007). Skeptics, such as Martell (2007), believe that the future of world politics will

be related to national states and their implementation. In addition, as much as the rise of globalist organizations is occurring, anti-globalist movements can be observed frequently all over the world, meaning that a large number of people in the world are not comfortable with the idea of global governance (Kellner 2002)

One of the main frameworks proposed by the skeptic school, the world system theory by Immanuel Wallenstein, asserts that the capitalist world system has been constituted by nation states and that the nation state still plays a central role in world politics (Robinson 2007). In addition, examining the resistance movements in a historical perspective and under the context of world system theory, Fenelon and Hall (2008) argue that the relationship between states and minorities has been demonstrating a linear tendency for nearly 5000 years, despite the presence of global structures in the world.

In short, skeptics reject the idea of global governance. They believe that what is happening in the name of globalization is internationalism, regionalism, and neo-liberal policies created by the capitalist order, but nothing else.

### **Post Skeptic Perspective**

The post skeptic perspective proposes that globalization is a real phenomenon and is affecting nation states. However, the nation state still plays a role in world politics. In these light, external forces such as human rights, population policy, and factors such as the environment, education, labor, and immigration, all have an enormous role to play in reshaping the structures of nation states. Therefore, while nation states are still major players in the context of the globalization process, the form of the nation state is prominently different from what it was before globalization (Thomas 2007). On the other hand, although international laws and the implementation of international organizations press for national sovereignty, national institutions are major players who put these international laws and other strategies into practice (Randeria 2007). As well, most NGO structured movements desire the existence of both weak states for domestic problems and strong states for foreign issues; therefore, a new and complex social order is appearing in the world (Randeria 2007).

Wade, one of the post-skeptic scholars, alleges that globalization created a new order, increasing inequality between states and with this order including the high US dollar, the existing WTO agreements provide for lower costs of financing the US military, which makes the US a strong post-imperial power, meaning that the US, which is the one of the most important major players in globalization is seeking to assert a national role in the realm of world politics. In addition, Castell (1999) asserts that states that are not

aware of global facts such as regional states and technological improvements cannot be strong states in this information age. However, for Castell (1999), being integrated as a result of globalization does not reduce the effect of the nation state, but redefines its structure. That is, the national state is seen to survive in a new form as long as it adjusts accordingly to sub national institutions, regional and local governments, and NGOs (Castell 1999).

One of the main representatives of the post-skeptical perspective, David Held (1999) notes that the structure of the nation state is reshaped by institutions of global governance, international laws and social movements. The sovereignty of the national state is shared by different agents. For Held, although territorial boundaries exist and maintain their importance, money flows and economic activities make nation states more open to foreigners and investments.

### **Conclusion and Critique**

Taking all the scholars mentioned above into consideration, I do not agree with globalist and skeptics, but do agree with post-skeptics for the following reasons. Starting with the globalists, I support their ideas about a new market system, the power of global governance and the issues of regional states as a rising reality. However, underestimating the importance of the nation state and its role in world politics is one of the main holes in the theory. As an example, in the Syrian crisis, while most of the countries illustrate a supportive picture for intervening in Syria, three national states Russia, China, and Iran are all stopping these endeavors. Another example can be given from the perspective of the European Union (EU). While most of the countries who are members of the EU use the Schengen visa agreement for foreigners from outside Europe, the United Kingdom uses her own visa implementation process despite the fact that she is member of the EU. In addition, in the Greek financial crisis, we can easily see the role of a nation state, such as Germany. While the Greek economic recovery plan looks like it is designed by the EU, Germany decides on every detail of the plan. Different examples can be gleaned from different parts of the world. For example, a new Latin America model such as that in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador each present examples of welfare state policies and are highly powerful nation states in their own right when dealing with the world capitalist order. We can certainly increase the number of these examples. All in all, therefore, while economic structures of the new global order do shape the role of the nation state significantly, it is safe to say that the role of the nation state should not be underestimated in dealing with political and cultural problems.

Considering the skeptic's perspective, while I do agree with their ideas, stating that the new economic order serves mainly Western countries

and third world states are suffering from this new system, I do not agree with their definition as regards globalization and their approach towards the role of nation state. That is, skeptics think that globalization is just an ongoing process of internationalization and nation states are still shaping world politics. There are so many countries, most of which are in Asia, benefiting from the global economy, and they are dominantly obeying the rules of the new economic order designed by global governance approaches. In the global era, I think, the role of the nation state must be defined in a balanced way, and one should avoid over or underestimating its importance. Last, but not least, I note that ideas of skeptics are related to the ideological approach.

As regards the last perspective, I agree with the post skeptics. First, their theory for the role of nation state compensates for the skeptic and global theories. Globalists believe that the nation state is a melting pot of transnational organizations. Skeptics argue that the nation state is gaining strength day by day. Post skeptics, however, allege that the structure of the nation state is changing; however, the melting pot idea of transnational organizations or its ability to gain strength seems oversimplified.

Second, post skeptical theory asserts that there is no single pattern to explain the role of the nation state in the global age, as we can see different examples compatible with both the globalist approach and the skeptic approach.

Third, the theory does not promulgate a sound future picture for the role of nation state. That is, the consequences of globalization cannot be deterministic. On the other hand, skeptics argue that the nation state will provide the last opportunity for defining the human political system, as referred to in linear and deterministic methodological approaches. That is, the globalist centers on the role of global governance in the future. Post skeptics, on the other hand, refrain from predicting the role of nation state in the future, as different examples are observed and what is happening related to globalization does not follow any predictable pattern.

In conclusion, as Randeria (2007) states in his article, “the result is a fuzzy politics.” However, the new structure of world order is clearly different from what it was before globalization. In other words, we are witnessing the role of strong international organizations in this order; however, this does not mean that the role of the nation state has vanished. In this vein, globalization has a negative and positive effect on the role of nation state. We need more studies, including quantitative and qualitative studies, to help us predict the consequences of globalization. The three perspectives discussed above, contribute to our understanding of globalization and the role of the nation state. However, rather than the ideological (skeptics) or the theoretical (globalists) perspective, eliminating the extremes of over and under estimating the outcomes of these perspectives

provides a better perspective, and reflects the post skeptic theory. With this perspective, I think, it is possible to articulate the role of the nation state in a very detailed and comprehensive manner.

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