Introduction

The topic of this part is political globalization, in particular the implications of globalization for the nation-state. In a world made up of powerful and highly stable nation-states, political globalization might seem like a contradiction in terms. A state (more commonly called "government" in the United States) is the sovereign authority in a specified territory, with the right to use force both to maintain internal order and to defend its territory against aggression. Sovereignty, in turn, implies that the state is the ultimate authority in its territory, exercising legal jurisdiction over its citizens and the groups and organizations they form in the conduct of daily life. The sovereign state is not subject to any higher authority; no state has the right to expect compliance from any other state, and no all-encompassing world state has emerged with authority over all national states. Sometimes the United Nations is described as the potential nucleus of a world state, but it has no compelling authority over its member states and it relies entirely on the action of its members to enforce compliance with its resolutions and the sanctions it imposes on misbehaving states.

In times past, world maps contained many different kinds of political unit, from small dukedoms and principalities to large empires ruled by powerful states. Nearly all of the small units have been absorbed in larger nation-states, and all but a few of the colonies held by former imperial powers like Britain and France have become independent sovereign states. With the dissolution of the last great empire, the Soviet Union, in the 1990s, the world is now composed almost entirely of sovereign nation-states.

What sense does it make, then, to speak of political globalization? First, the very fact that the entire world, with the exception of the arctic areas and a few small colonies and dependencies, is organized by a single type of political unit, the nation-state, is a sign of globalization. Never before has the world been composed of only one type

The Globalization Reader, Fifth Edition. Edited by Frank J. Lechner and John Boli.
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Published 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

of political unit. The rapid decolonization of the twentieth century, when more than 130 colonies or dependencies became independent states, was a great political surprise, since most of these new states are too small and weak to defend themselves effectively from more powerful states. This indicates that the principle of state sovereignty itself has become a central feature of global society, and that a particular model of political organization, the sovereign state, has achieved global status as the most desirable, viable, and legitimate way of structuring political life.

Second, political globalization is indicated by the considerable uniformity exhibited by sovereign states in terms of their goals, structures, programs, and internal operations. Almost all states assume responsibility for a wide range of activities, including education, health care, management of the economy and finance, retirement pensions, environmental protection, and poverty alleviation, alongside the classic core concerns of states, foreign policy and military defense. Almost all states have elaborate bureaucratic structures to administer the many programs they operate to meet their responsibilities. And almost all states are formally structured (in their constitutions and legislation) as democracies in which all citizens have an equal right to vote in elections that determine the holders of executive and legislative positions. Thus, a common basic model of the state is in place everywhere in the world, though states vary considerably in how they implement the model.

A third dimension of political globalization is the emergence in the past hundred years of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). IGOs are associations of states created to deal with problems and manage issues that affect many countries at once or involve high levels of interdependence among countries. Of the approximately 300 global IGOs and more than a thousand regional or subregional IGOs, most are concerned with economic, technical, or political matters. Most prominent are the United Nations and its associated agencies (UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and so on), which constitute a central world political forum within which states conduct their international relations. Other prominent bodies include the World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which help manage the world economy; the International Telecommunication Union and INTELSAT, which supervise global telecommunications and satellite systems; the International Civil Aviation Organization, which oversees commercial air transportation; and the Universal Postal Union, which coordinates international postal services.

As economic globalization has increased, as technology and technical systems have become more encompassing and complex, as problems like pollution and narcotics trafficking and terrorism have also become global, the adequacy of states to cope with the rapidly integrating world has increasingly been called into question. Many transnational corporations (TNCs) have larger sales revenues than the entire economies of most countries, and global financial transactions amount to trillions of dollars per day – so the world economy is beyond the control of states. Global warming and environmental degradation are inevitable byproducts of economic development, and states are too much concerned with their own development to take serious action about such problems. Religious and ethnic groups within countries are increasingly militant and well armed, threatening the viability of the states they oppose. These and numerous other factors have led many

observers to speak of repeated "crises" of the state and to predict the breakdown or irrelevance of states.

Other observers caution that the death of the state has been announced prematurely. Problems may be increasingly global in scale, but states are also larger and more capable than ever before. Their tax revenues constitute a larger share of gross national product than ever before; they have larger and better trained bureaucracies than ever; and they are remarkably effective in operating national health care systems, pension plans, postal services, road and air transportation systems, and many other programs, at least in the more developed countries. The demands on states are certainly growing, perhaps even faster than states can keep up with them, but it is by no means certain that states are as incapable of dealing with their responsibilities as many critics claim. Only in smaller and poorer countries do we find clearly weak states that fall far short of global expectations for their performance.

Our selections in this part begin with the view that the nation-state is incapacitated by globalization. Susan Strange, a British international relations scholar, argues that the power and authority of the state are declining due to technological change and the rapid escalation of capital costs for successful innovation. These factors force states to do the bidding of transnational corporations, whose massive resources are seen as necessary to maintain national competitiveness in the global economy. Strange notes the paradox that declining state effectiveness has been accompanied by growing state intervention into people's daily lives, but such intervention has less to do with fundamental responsibilities and increasingly focuses on marginal issues.

Strange's analysis is complemented by American international relations professor James H. Mittelman's work on global organized crime. Mittelman describes transnational criminal organizations as operating both above and below the state, in the first instance as transnational corporations taking full advantage of globalized technologies that put them beyond the reach of states, in the second instance as a means by which poor and marginalized groups try to cope with globalization's dislocations. Concentrated in global cities, organized crime destabilizes the global economy and makes the task of governance ever more problematic for states.

Dani Rodrik, an American economist, provides evidence that economic globalization may indeed have undermined the capacity of states to give adequate support to citizens. The problem, Rodrik says, is that companies in the developed countries can move their operations to places where labor costs are lower and unions are weak. This practice lowers wages, diminishes labor's bargaining power, and lowers government revenues so that welfare and social security programs become more difficult to support. The developed countries' economies are also undercut by the low-cost imports available to consumers, which further intensifies this downward spiral. Rodrik argues that states should respond by being more skeptical of free trade and capital flows, so a balance can be struck between openness and social responsibility.

A contrary view emerges in the selection by British political scientist John Glenn on state "social spending" (for education, pensions, health care, income support, and the like) in recent decades. Glenn finds little evidence of retrenchment by the state in the developed countries (the "global North"): in the 1990s, when scholars were proclaiming the death or irrelevancy of the state, both overall state spending and social spending were higher than ever (though they declined slightly in the latter part of the

decade). The same generally holds for less developed countries in the "global South," but an important "North–South divide" prevails: states in the South, particularly poorer and more peripheral states, engage in much more restricted social spending. Glenn explores features of the world economy that help explain why this is so.

In the last selection in this part, American sociologists David P. Baker and Gerald K. LeTendre add another corrective to claims about the purported decline of the state. They point out that mass schooling has expanded dramatically almost everywhere in the world, as a global process that engages all states and results in remarkably similar educational systems in most places. States pursue education to make their citizens literate and economically productive, loyal to the nation, and capable of managing their own lives, and they do so despite often severe resource limitations. Poorer and weaker countries may have inadequate school systems, but they are fully committed to improving them to the extent that they can.