KEY POINTS

- Global politics as a field of study encompasses the traditional concerns of IR with how states interact under conditions of anarchy but places more emphasis on the role of non-state actors and processes in a globalizing world.
- Globalization became a prominent concept after the end of the Cold War. Although it is a contested concept, it generally denotes the compression of time and space together with the transcending of traditional political, economic, and cultural boundaries.
- Conventional approaches to the study of global politics or IR have generally been dominated by Western perspectives, thus limiting the relevance and applicability of its insights.

STATES AND NATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL POLITICS

The terms 'state' and 'nation' are often used synonymously or joined together to produce 'nation-state', but they refer to two quite distinct entities. You will find that the 'state' by itself is given several different dictionary meanings. But for present purposes, the 'state' refers to a distinctive political community with its own set of rules and practices and which is more or less separate from other such communities. As we saw in Chapter 8, the state is virtually synonymous with the structure of rule and authority, and the institutions which regulate these, within a particular geographical space. In the global sphere, 'the state' refers specifically to the modern sovereign state which is recognized as possessing certain rights and duties. This kind of state is

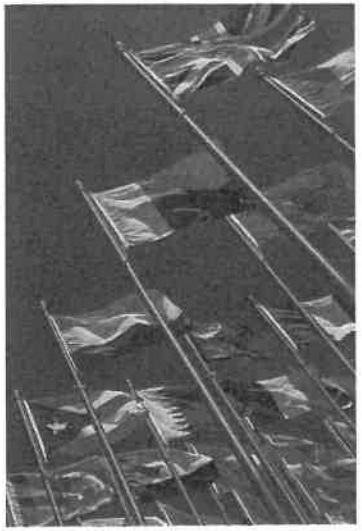

Photo 16.1 Though the terms 'state' and 'nation' are often used together, they are actually quite distinct entities. *Shutterstock RF via DAM: Artistic Photo/ Shutterstock*

distinct from the states that generally make up a federal system, such as the individual states of which the United *States* of America is composed—or of India, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa, Germany, Russia, Canada, or Australia, and others which are also federal systems.

The sovereign state has been given a clear legal definition by the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. Of the sixteen articles adopted in this convention, the most important are the first eleven, and of these, Article 1 provides the most succinct understanding of the criteria for a modern sovereign state, namely: *a permanent population; a defined territory and a government capable of maintaining effective control over its territory and of conducting international relations with other states.* Thus the state in global politics is envisaged as a *formally constituted, sovereign political structure encompassing people, territory, and institutions.* As such, a state interacts with similarly constituted structures in an international system of states which, ideally, is characterized by peaceful, non-coercive relations, thus establishing a similarly peaceful international order conducive to the prosperity of all. One might well say, if only it were so! The last century saw horrific manifestations of large-scale inter-state war, putting paid to the notion that a sovereign state system could guarantee peace. On the other hand, inter-state warfare has been on the decline with most large-scale violent conflicts now taking the form of civil wars. The latter, however, very often involve other states as well. A notable example in the present period is the Syrian civil war in which Russia and Iran have supported the government of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad while the US and various other state actors including Turkey, France, and Saudi Arabia have intervened as well, although mainly in areas where IS forces had taken over.

We look in more detail at the historic emergence of the state shortly, but for now let us consider the **nation**, a term which refers specifically to 'a people' rather than a formal, territorial entity. There is no widely agreed definition of what constitutes 'a people' beyond the fact that it denotes a species of collective identity grounded in a notion of shared history and culture and which often lays claim to some kind of political recognition as well as to a specific territory. We have seen in Chapter 6 that **nationalism** as an ideology holds that political organization ought to be based on a 'national identity'. Nationalist ideology in general therefore supports the claims that each nation is entitled, in principle, to a state of its own. Since the early twentieth century, this has generally been based on the apparently democratic principle of national **self-determination**.

→ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of nationalism.

Nationalism, at least in the more extreme right-wing versions, may also seek the exclusion of 'alien' elements from an existing state to safeguard the 'authenticity' of its national character. Nationalism as an ideology is therefore often implicated in debates about immigration and border protection and also stands opposed to some of the principle elements of globalization which favour more open borders and free trade. These issues have been especially prominent in debates about Brexit as well as President Trump's policies in the US.

However defined, 'nations' are assumed to populate sovereign states and are very often described in singular terms; that is, one state may be assumed to contain one nation. The state of France, for example, is occupied by the 'French nation', Japan by the 'Japanese nation', Turkey by the 'Turkish nation', and so on. These examples indicate the commonly accepted conflation of state and people that produces the familiar term 'nation-state' which, again, reflects the principle of national self-determination. However, only a moment's critical reflection is needed to recognize that the matching of state and nation is seldom so neat. Rather, it is an ideal that has rarely, if ever, been achieved. There is virtually no state in the world encompassing a single, homogeneous nation. Japan is often described as a 'pure' nation-state but it has an indigenous minority—the

Ainu—and also encompasses the people of Okinawa who consider themselves as distinct. Turkey has other minorities—the Kurds for example—who, along with Kurds in other parts of the region, consider themselves a nation in their own right.

Many states are made up of two or more 'nations'. The contemporary British state, for example, is comprised of recognized substate national entities: the Welsh, Scots, English, and Northern Irish. In 2014, the Scottish 'nation' voted on whether or not to establish Scotland as a sovereign state, failing by just under 6 per cent. But all the national sub-groups within the UK are multilayered, especially since immigration over the centuries has brought dozens of different 'nationalities' to the British Isles, thereby producing the 'multicultural' and indeed 'multinational' Britain of the contemporary period. A close inspection of other national entities in Europe will show similar stories. And what started out as British settler colonies, which are a legacy of modern empire and of mass migration—both aspects of globalization—are now among the most 'multinational' in the world today—the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in particular.

If we look to places like Nigeria, India, and China, however, it is also evident that these states are made up of many different groups speaking different local languages and possessing different cultural practices. Even relatively small states can be incredibly diverse. Papua New Guinea, for example, has a population of just over 6 million, yet there are more than 850 different languages spoken and each language group could theoretically consider itself to be 'a nation'. It is often because of such diversity that states like Papua New Guinea are seen to be 'weak states' or 'fragile states'. On the other hand, Somalia, often considered a classic example of a 'failed state', is relatively culturally homogeneous. But social order in Somalia, to the extent that it exists, has been extremely fractious.

Although most states are acknowledged as containing many more than one 'nation', the identity of the state will to some extent be equated with a dominant majority. Thus in the USA, Canada, and Australia, for example, a dominant white English-speaking majority constitutes a mainstream. Another interesting case is China where the category of 'Han Chinese' constitutes more than 90 per cent of the population, although these speak numerous different dialects and are therefore scarcely homogeneous. China also encompasses Tibet and the Tibetans, who are clearly distinct from the dominant majority, as are the Uigar people of the north-western Xinjiang region who are largely Muslim. Both areas have given rise to secessionist or independence movements.

In other cases, secession movements, usually based on a claim by a minority to a distinct nationhood that can be properly accommodated only by the establishment of a sovereign state of their own, have led to civil war. Although such conflicts are technically *intra*state, they invariably have significant repercussions in the global sphere, from the generation of large numbers of asylum seekers to the fuelling of illicit trade in weapons.

This brief discussion of the basic distinctions between 'state' and 'nation'—and some of the political dynamics associated with the relationship between the two entities—provides some indication of how simple terms attempt to capture complex realities. It also highlights how modern sovereign states are often seen as constituted through and by a 'nation'. Sometimes these nations claim a very long and continuous history, usually in association with a particular territory. Other nations have been much more recently 'constructed' and are sometimes described as 'artificial' for that reason. The contemporary 'Australian nation', for example, may be seen as a construct with its origins in the relatively recent past; that is, from the beginning of British settlement in 1788, although it also encompasses indigenous Australians whose ancestors have occupied the

land for up to 60,000 years as well as more recent immigrants from all around the world. The 'South African nation', another product of European colonialism, is also incredibly diverse as reflected in the fact that there are eleven official languages.

Whatever their historic status and the manner of their formation, nations are seen as integral to, and indeed constitutive of, the modern state. The term 'nation-state' is therefore likely to endure as a category in global political order for the foreseeable future, even though the constitution of particular nations and the political claims made in their name remain deeply contested.

KEY POINTS

- The terms 'state' and 'nation' tend to be used synonymously but are distinct entities.
- The 'nation' in a 'nation-state' is often assumed to be homogeneous in terms of culture or ethnicity but this is rarely the case.
- The relationship between 'state' and 'nation' is complex and often gives rise to deep political contestation.

STATES AND EMPIRES IN GLOBAL HISTORY

In this section we consider the variation in state forms and the phenomenon of empire throughout history. This illustrates that international systems are highly variable and that the sovereign state system with which we are familiar today may very well be replaced by a different kind of system at some point in the future. Certainly, proponents of 'globalism' believe that a transformation is under way in which state boundaries and controls will become increasingly meaningless. Others have identified a new era of empire, although there are differing views as to where its principal centre of power may lie and whether it constitutes a genuine form of imperialism. Yet others seek to reinforce the existing state system and its boundaries, emphasizing the importance of 'the nation' as the prime constituent element of the sovereign state, its integrity, and indeed its security. This has been especially noticeable in recent debates about immigration in Britain, the USA, and Australia where conservative politicians and their supporters have tended to portray migrants as a security threat. But it is also evident in other settings where minority communities are sometimes considered not part of the legitimate or authentic nation. A prime example is the minority community of Rohingya people in Myanmar where the government denies that they are indigenous to their area in Rakhine state, rather suggesting that they are 'illegal immigrants' from Bangladesh.

Note that, in this section, I use the term *international* system when referring to phenomena that are not truly global. For example, empires throughout history may be described as a form of 'international' system in the sense that they encompass different states (and/or nations), but empires are not generally 'global' in the sense that they gather in all such entities around the world under a single centre of power. Whether a true 'global empire' is ever likely to come about is another question.

Let us begin with the concept of the state understood simply as a political community. The earliest of these date more or less from the time that human groups first developed settled agricultural