

# The Political Economy of Globalization

Ahmed Fouad EL HADDAD

UPEC – IEP Fontainebleau

September 25, 2025

# About the Lecturer

- **Name:** Ahmed Fouad El Haddad
- **Position:** Associate Professor of Political Science, IEP Fontainebleau – Université Paris-Est Créteil
- **Research Areas:** Comparative politics, authoritarian political economy, social policies, computational social sciences

# A Familiar Object



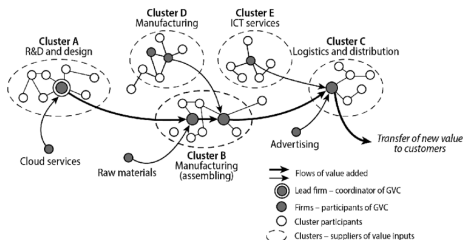
## **The iPhone as a window into globalization:**

- Designed in California.
- Assembled in China.
- Components sourced worldwide.
- Sold and used globally.

# Global Value Chains and Uneven Globalization

- Globalization can look **beautiful** — innovation, connectivity, access to goods and information.
- It can also look **ugly** — exploitation, inequality, environmental damage, and e-waste.
- Your experience depends on **where you stand in the global value chain**.

Most people engage with globalization through everyday products — smartphones, clothing, food — but rarely consider how these are made.



*A typical global value chain: extraction → assembly → consumption → disposal.*

# Who Stands Where in the Global Chain?

If you own an iPhone, you're likely at the **consumption end** of the chain — benefiting from convenience, design, and global access. Others, however, are positioned on more precarious links in the chain:

- **Extraction** — cobalt miners in the Congo working under dangerous conditions.
- **Assembly** — factory workers in Shenzhen performing repetitive labor for low wages.
- **Disposal** — e-waste handlers in Ghana or India exposed to toxic components.

## Core Argument

Globalization is a **distributional conflict** over resources, labor, and opportunity. It must be understood in both **economic** and **power-relational** terms.

# Winners and Losers of the iPhone Economy

Dimension	Winners	Losers
Geography	Apple (USA), high-tech suppliers (Japan, Korea, Taiwan)	Assembly workers in China (low wages, harsh conditions)
Capital	Shareholders, global investors	Local firms excluded from supply chain
Environment	Consumers enjoying digital connectivity	Mining regions, e-waste sites

## Lesson

The iPhone generates **profits and innovation**, but also **inequalities and conflicts**. This is why we need a **political economy perspective**.

# From iPhone to Obsidian: A Long History of Globalization

- Globalization is not new. Long-distance trade predates modern capitalism.
- It is not linear: periods of intense connection alternate with deglobalization.
- It is not just economic: globalization reshapes culture, identity, power.
- It is not neutral: globalization produces **winners and losers**.

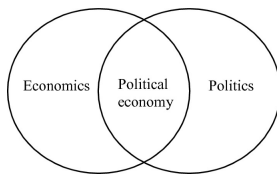
## Key Idea (O'Rourke & Williamson, 2019)

Globalization is shaped not only by technology, but by **political economy forces** — from domestic institutions to geopolitical conflict.

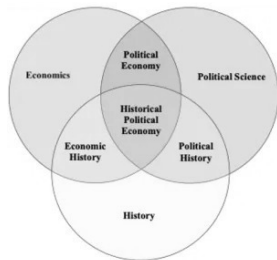
→ *To understand globalization, we need theory, history, and critical thinking.*

# What Do We Mean by Political Economy?

- **Political Economy (PE)** — the study of how **economic processes** are shaped by **power, institutions, and conflict**.
- **International Political Economy (IPE)** — focuses on how global flows of trade, finance, and production intersect with **geopolitics** and **domestic politics**.
- **This course:** we use the tools of PE and IPE to understand globalization's:
  - Historical trajectories
  - Winners and losers
  - Political consequences



(a)



(b)



# From Political Economy to Global Studies

- Political Economy and International Political Economy (IPE) have helped us understand how economics and politics interact — nationally and globally.
- However, globalization cannot be fully explained through nation-states or economic structures alone.
- Globalization is messy, multidimensional, and often contradictory. It compresses time and space, connects and disconnects, empowers and marginalizes.
- Scholars from different disciplines disagree not only on the causes or consequences of globalization, but even on what it actually is.
- This intellectual complexity opened the way for a new academic response: **Global Studies**.

*What happens when globalization becomes the object of study ⇒ not just a background condition?*

# The Rise of Global Studies

- Since the 1990s, **Global Studies** emerged as a new academic response to the challenge of understanding globalization.
- Unlike traditional disciplines — which center on concepts like ‘society’, ‘power’, or ‘scarcity’ — Global Studies places **globalization itself** at the center.
- It rejects *methodological nationalism* (IR’s focus on states) in favor of **methodological globalism** — focusing on flows, networks, and non-state actors.
- Global Studies emphasizes:
  - Multidimensionality: economy, culture, ecology, technology, ideology...
  - Interdisciplinarity: bridging social sciences, humanities, and beyond
  - Fluidity: dynamic and contested processes
  - Critical thinking: questioning power, inequality, and exclusion
- Today, it structures hundreds of academic programs worldwide.

# What Is Globalization? Beyond Flows and Borders

## Key conceptual distinctions (Steger, 2023):

- **Globalization** — expansion of social relations across world-space and world-time.
- **Globality** — condition of dense, multi-scalar interconnections.
- **Global imaginary** — growing awareness of the world as a single space.
- **Globalisms** — competing ideologies about what globalization means (e.g., neoliberal, justice-oriented, nationalist).

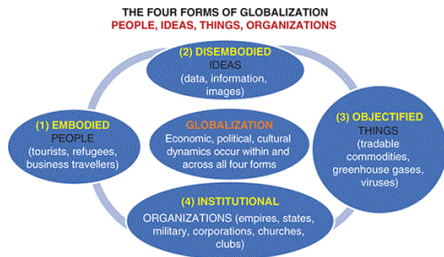
# Broader understanding of globalization

## Globalization is not only about trade and migration:

- It transforms **identities**, **imaginaries**, and **institutions**.
- It connects distant places into a **single interdependent system**.
- It produces new forms of **inequality**, but also **interdependence**.
- It operates simultaneously on **economic**, **social**, **cultural**, and **political** levels.

# Four Forms of Globalization

- **Embodied** — Movement of people: migrants, tourists, refugees. Human bodies act as carriers of ideas, labor, and culture.
- **Disembodied** — Transmission of information, ideas, and digital content. Flows occur via media, the internet, and communications.
- **Objectified** — Global movement of goods, commodities, and capital. Includes material trade and financial exchange.
- **Institutional** — Operations of global structures: states, NGOs, empires, and international organizations.



**Figure:** The four forms of globalization.  
*Source:* M. B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, 6th ed. (2024).

# The iPhone and the Forms of Globalization

## The iPhone illustrates four forms of globalization (Steger, 2024):

- **Embodied:** Migrant labor in factories (e.g., Foxconn in China).
- **Disembodied:** Apple's design, branding, and digital ecosystem.
- **Objectified:** Physical components sourced and shipped worldwide.
- **Institutional:** Trade rules, tax regimes, and supply chain governance.

*The iPhone condenses globalization into a single consumer object.*

# Course Overview: Political Economy of Globalization

**Objective:** Equip you with conceptual and analytical tools to understand globalization as a political-economic process.

## Foundations:

- What is globalization?
- States vs. markets (Polanyi, Marx)
- Varieties of capitalism

## Structures:

- Global governance
- Regimes and institutions
- Dependency and world-systems

→ 10 sessions to analyze globalization critically — from theory to current debates.

## Crises and Conflicts:

- Globalization and inequality
- Crises and deglobalization
- Populism, backlash, and protectionism

## Futures:

- Deglobalization?
- Technology and climate
- China and the new world order