

## CHAPTER 1 Introducing Global Politics

This is the version of the chapter accepted for publication in Heywood, Andrew and Whitham, Ben (2023) *Global Politics* (3rd Edition). London: Bloomsbury (2023)  
Re-use is subject to the publisher's terms and conditions  
This version downloaded from SOAS Research Online: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/39134>

“*The world is always new ... however old its roots*”

URSULA K. LE GUIN, *The Word for World is Forest* (1972)

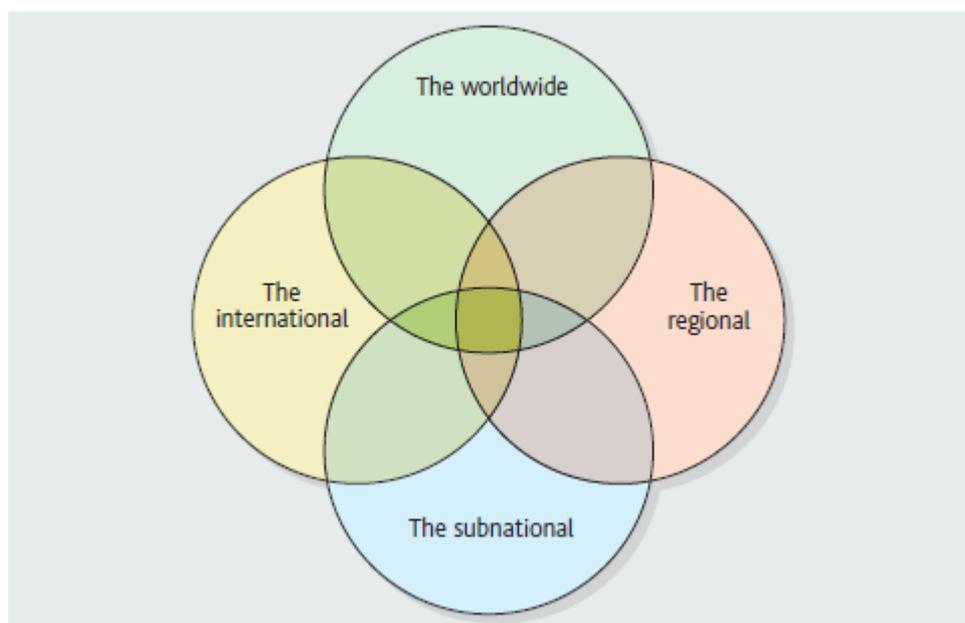
### PREVIEW

How should we study politics? Traditionally, there was a tendency to focus on political actors and institutions at the local and national levels. Beyond this, students and scholars in the political sub-field of international relations (IR) tend to consider ‘the international’ as the political space in which these local and national political interests are represented in the form of interaction between states, regions of states, and a worldwide ‘states-system’. But since the late twentieth century, the concept of globalization has challenged these narrow, state-centric ways of thinking about politics. This book is about *global* politics, which is to say it is about how politics – struggles over power, how it should be distributed, and how we might best organise ourselves and live together as societies – works at the global level.

But what is ‘the global’ when it comes to politics, and why does it matter? How does it differ from ‘the international’, as a way of seeing or imagining our world? What kinds of actors, institutions, and processes contribute the most to the globalisation of politics, and which ones try to hold back its tide, and why? This chapter explores the rise of a global imaginary in discussions of politics and international relations, considers its implications for the study and practice of world politics – including issues ranging from state sovereignty to the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic – and reflects upon continuity and change in global politics.

### KEY ISSUES

- What is ‘the global’ and how does it relate to ‘the international’?
- How have the contours of world politics changed in recent decades?
- What have been the implications of globalization for world politics?
- How do mainstream approaches to global politics differ from critical approaches?
- Which aspects of world politics are changed by globalisation, and which remain the same?



**Figure 1.1** The domain of global politics

## **FROM ‘THE INTERNATIONAL’ TO ‘THE GLOBAL’?**

The aim of this book is to provide an up-to-date, integrated and forward-looking introduction to global politics . It seeks to be genuinely global while not ignoring the international dimension of world affairs, accepting that ‘the global’ and ‘the international’ complement one another and are not rival or incompatible modes of understanding. In this view, global politics encompasses not just politics at the ‘global’ level – that is, worldwide processes, systems and institutional frameworks – but politics at, and, crucially, across, *all* levels – the worldwide, the regional, the national and the subnational (see Figure 1.1). Such an approach reflects the fact that while, over an increasing range of issues, **states** interact with one another in conditions of global interconnectedness and interdependence, they nevertheless remain the key actors on the world stage.

However, if the international paradigm, in which world affairs boil down, essentially, to relations between and among states, no longer constitutes an adequate basis for understanding, what has changed, and how profound have these changes been? How have the contours of world politics changed in recent years? The most significant changes have been the following:

- The emergence of new global actors
- The growth of interdependence and interconnectedness

- The erosion of the domestic/international divide
- The rise of global governance.

**State:** A political institution that successfully claims sovereign jurisdiction within defined territorial borders.

### **Focus on . . . Defining global politics?**

What does it mean to suggest that politics has ‘gone global’? How does ‘global’ politics differ from ‘international’ politics? The term ‘international’ means *between nations*, and is today commonly understood to mean between nation-states or simply ‘states’. The term ‘global’, on the other hand, has two meanings. In the first, global means *worldwide*, having planetary (not merely regional or national) significance. The globe is, in effect, the world. Global politics, in this sense, refers to politics that is conducted at a global rather than a local, national or regional level. It therefore focuses primarily on the work of organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which have a near universal membership, and on issues (such as the environment and the economy) where interconnectedness has gone so far that events and developments affect, actually or potentially, all parts of the world and so all people on the planet.

In the second meaning (the one used in this book), global means *comprehensive*; it refers to *all* elements within a system, not just to the system as a whole. While such an approach acknowledges that a significant (and, perhaps, growing) range of political interactions now takes place at the global level, it rejects the idea that the global level has, in any sense, *transcended* politics at the national, local or, for that matter, any other level. In particular, the advent of global politics does not imply that international politics should be consigned to the dustbin of history. This is important because the notion that politics has been caught up in a swirl of interconnectedness that effectively absorbs all of its parts, or ‘units’, into an indivisible, global whole, is difficult to sustain.

### **From state-centrism to the mixed-actor model and interdependence?**

World politics has conventionally been understood in international terms. Although the larger phenomenon of patterns of conflict and cooperation between and among territorially-based political units has existed throughout history, the term ‘international relations’ was not coined until the UK philosopher and legal reformer, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), used it in his *Principles of Morals and Legislation* ([1789] 1968). Bentham’s use of the term acknowledged a significant shift: that, by the late eighteenth century, territorially-based political units were coming to have a more clearly national character, making relations between them appear genuinely ‘inter-national’. However, although most modern states are either nation-states (see p. 168) or aspire to be nation-states, it is their possession of statehood rather than nationhood that allows them to act effectively on the world stage. ‘International’ politics should thus, more properly, be described as ‘inter-state’ politics. But what is a state? As defined in international law by the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, a state must possess four qualifying properties:

- a defined territory
- a permanent population
- an effective government
- the ‘capacity to enter into relations with other states’.

In this view, states, or countries (the terms can be used interchangeably in this context); are taken to be the key actors on the world stage, and perhaps the only ones that warrant serious consideration. This is why the conventional approach to world politics is seen as **state-centric**, and why the international system is often portrayed as a **states-system**. The origins of this view of international politics are usually traced back to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which established sovereignty (see p. 4) as the distinguishing feature of the state. State sovereignty thus became the primary organizing principle of international politics.

**State-centrism:** An approach to political analysis that takes the state to be the most important actor in the domestic realm and on the world stage.

**States-system:** A pattern of relationships between and amongst states that establishes a measure of order and predictability (see p. 5).

## Sovereignty

Sovereignty is the principle of supreme and unquestionable authority, reflected in the claim by the state to be the sole author of laws within its territory. *External* sovereignty (sometimes called ‘state sovereignty’ or ‘national sovereignty’) refers to the capacity of the state to act independently and autonomously on the world stage. This implies that states are legally equal and that the territorial integrity and political independence of a state are inviolable. *Internal* sovereignty refers to the location of supreme power/authority within the state. The institution of sovereignty is nevertheless developing and changing, both as new concepts of sovereignty emerge (‘economic sovereignty’, ‘food sovereignty’ and so on) and as sovereignty is adapted to new circumstances (‘pooled sovereignty’, ‘responsible sovereignty’ and so forth).

However, the state-centric approach to world politics has become increasingly difficult to sustain. This has happened, in part, because it is no longer possible to treat states as the only significant actors on the world stage. Transnational corporations (TNCs) (see p. 94), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (see p. 10) and a host of other non-state bodies have come to exert influence. In different ways and to different degrees, groups and organizations ranging from ISIS (see p. XXX), the #MeToo movement (see p. XXX) and Extinction Rebellion (see p. XXX) to Google (see p. XXX), contribute to shaping world politics. Since the 1970s, indeed, pluralist theorists have advocated a **mixed-actor model** of world politics. However, although it is widely accepted that states and national governments are merely one category of actor amongst many on the world stage, they may still remain the most important actors. No TNC or NGOs, for instance, can rival the state’s coercive power, either its capacity to enforce order within its borders or its ability to deal militarily with other states. (The changing role and significance of the state are examined in depth in Chapter 5.)

**Mixed-actor model:** The theory that, while not ignoring the role of states and national governments, international politics is shaped by a much broader range of interests and groups.

While the state unquestionably retains a significant degree of power in global politics as compared to other actors, the so-called **'billiard ball' model** – according to which, states are essentially discrete, bounded entities interacting with (or 'bouncing off') one another in international relations – is less sustainable. This model, traditionally advocated by 'realist' thinkers (see p. XXX) has lost ground to the 'neoliberal institutionalist' (see p. XXX) claim that global politics is in fact characterised by 'complex interdependence' (Keohane and Nye, 1977), but also to 'critical' explanations (see Chapter 4) that suggest the international relations are really social relations, and thus were never entirely contained by the state. The mixture of actors and the range of issues over which they interact, the non-state and sub-state channels of interaction, and the increasing primacy of economic activity, have all brought the **global imaginary** of a state-centric 'Westphalian' order (see p. XXX) into question.

#### CONCEPT

##### **Interdependence**

Interdependence refers to a relationship between two parties in which each is affected by decisions that are taken by the other. Interdependence implies mutual influence, even a rough equality between the parties in question, usually arising from a sense of mutual vulnerability. Interdependence, then, is usually associated with a trend towards cooperation and integration in world affairs. Keohane and Nye (1977) advanced the idea of 'complex interdependence' as an alternative to the realist model of international politics. This highlighted the extent to which (1) states have ceased to be autonomous international actors; (2) economic and other issues have become more prominent in world affairs; and (3) military force has become a less reliable and less important policy option.

Some argue that the state's special status as a global actor is preserved because it retains what the political sociologist Max Weber famously called the 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber, 1919). The state's role as the entity that wages war, and maintains domestic law and order, is supposed to render it unique. But even this seems less certain in the early twenty-first century, with

the rise of private military and security companies (PMSCs) – the modern form of what have been known as ‘mercenaries’ – on the one hand, and the increasing privatisation of policing and prisons, on the other. In their international relations, states have increasingly relied on PMSCs in armed conflicts, such as the US in the Iraq War, while PMSCs have also been involved as paramilitary and covert forces in attempted *coups d’etat*. An example of the latter is the unsuccessful attempt by former US Special Forces soldiers employed by a PMSC called Silvercorp USA to overthrow Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in May 2020 (these mercenaries were ultimately captured and jailed by Venezuelan forces). Within states, meanwhile, armed and state-sanctioned private security firms have offered everything from the guarding of majority-white ‘gated communities’ in Johannesburg, South Africa, to the routine running of prisons and immigration detention centres in the USA and the UK. While states may retain the greatest quantity, and perhaps quality, of the means of ‘legitimate’ violence, they no longer appear to have a monopoly. The expanded role of sub-state and private actors in expressions of ‘war power’ and ‘police power’ (Neocleous, 2014) lends further weight to the claim that we live in a ‘post-Westphalian’, global order characterised by complexity and interdependence.

**‘Billiard ball’ model** a way of seeing global politics, particularly among ‘realist’ thinkers, as a set of interactions between territorially-bounded, discrete states; it is a state-centric model (see p. XXX). **Global imaginary:** an ‘imaginary’ is a way of seeing or imagining things. A global imaginary is a holistic way of imagining social, political, and economic life, at the level of the whole world rather than the local, national, or even international.

### **Focus on . . . The Westphalian states-system**

The Peace of Westphalia (1648) is commonly said to mark the beginning of modern international politics. The Peace was a series of treaties that brought an end to the Thirty Years War (1618–48), which consisted of a series of declared and undeclared wars throughout central Europe involving the Holy Roman Empire and various opponents, including the Danes, the Dutch and, above all, France and Sweden. Although the transition occurred over a much longer period of time, these treaties

helped to transform a medieval Europe of overlapping authorities, loyalties and identities into a modern state-system. The so-called ‘Westphalian system’ was based on two key principles:

- States enjoy sovereign jurisdiction, in the sense that they have independent control over what happens within their territory (all other institutions and groups, spiritual and temporal, are therefore subordinate to the state).
- Relations between and among states are structured by the acceptance of the sovereign independence of all states (thus implying that states are legally equal).

### **From the domestic/international divide to transnationalism?**

One of the key implications of approaching study from the perspective of ‘the international’ is that politics has a distinct spatial or territorial character. In short, borders and boundaries matter. This applies especially in the case of the distinction between domestic politics, which is concerned with the state’s role in maintaining order and carrying out regulation within its borders, and international politics, which is concerned with relations between and among states. In that sense, sovereignty is a ‘hard shell’ that divides the ‘inside’ of politics from the ‘outside’. This domestic/international, or ‘inside/outside’, divide also separates what have conventionally been seen as two quite different spheres of political interaction. Whereas politics ‘inside’ has an orderly and regulated character, stemming from the ability of the state within the domestic sphere to impose rule from above, order of this kind is absent from politics ‘outside’, in that there is no authority in the international sphere higher than the sovereign state. According to John Agnew (1994), such thinking had created a ‘territorial trap’ within the discipline of international relations, reflected in three assumptions. First, the state is a clearly bounded territorial space. Second, domestic and foreign affairs are entirely different realms. Third, states are ‘containers’ of society, implying that the boundaries of the state coincide with the boundaries of society.

Such an emphasis on borders and clear territorial divisions have nevertheless come under pressure as a result of recent trends and developments, not least those associated with **globalization**. In particular, there has been a substantial growth in cross-border

flows and transactions – movements of people, goods, money, information and ideas. This has created the phenomenon of **transnationalism**. As state borders have become increasingly ‘porous’, the conventional domestic/international, or ‘inside/outside’ divide has become more difficult to uphold. This can be illustrated by both the substantially greater vulnerability of domestic economies to events that take place elsewhere in the world (as demonstrated by the wide-ranging impact of the 2007–08 global financial crisis, and of the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic) and by the wider use of digital technologies that enable people to communicate with one another through means (such as mobile phones and the Internet) that national governments find difficult to control. It is also notable that issues that are prominent in world affairs, such as environmental politics and human rights (see p. 311), tend to have an intrinsically transnational character. However, claims that the modern world is effectively ‘borderless’ are manifestly absurd, and, in some ways, territorial divisions are becoming more important, not less important. This is evident, for instance, in the greater emphasis on national or ‘homeland’ security in many parts of the world since the terrorist attacks of September 11, and in attempts to constrain international migration by strengthening border and other immigration controls.

**Globalization:** The emergence of a complex web of interconnectedness that means that our lives are increasingly shaped by events that occur, and decisions that are made, at a great distance from us (see p. 8).

**Transnationalism:** Political, social, economic or other forms that transcend or cut across national borders

### **From international anarchy to global governance?**

A key assumption of the traditional approach to international politics, and especially ‘realist’ thinking (see p. XXX), has been that the states-system operates in a context of **anarchy**. This reflects the notion that there is no higher authority than the state, meaning that external politics operates as an international ‘state of nature’, a pre-political society. The implications of international anarchy are profound. Most importantly, in the absence of any other force attending to their interests, states are forced to rely on themselves in a system of ‘self-help’ (see p. XXX). If international politics operates as a ‘self-help system’, the power-seeking inclinations of one state are

only tempered by competing tendencies in other states, suggesting that conflict and war are inevitable features of the international system. In this view, conflict is only constrained by a **balance of power**, developed either as a diplomatic strategy by peace-minded leaders or occurring through a happy coincidence. This image of anarchy has been modified by the idea that the international system operates more like an ‘international society’ (see p. 9). Hedley Bull ([1977] 2012) thus advanced the notion of an ‘anarchical society’, in place of the conventional theory of international anarchy.

**Anarchy:** Literally, without rule; the absence of a central government or higher authority, sometimes, but not necessarily, associated with instability and chaos.

**Balance of power:** A condition in which no one state predominates over others, tending to create general equilibrium and curb the hegemonic ambitions of all states (see p. 262).

However, the idea of international anarchy, and even the more modest notion of an ‘anarchical society’, have become more difficult to sustain because of the emergence, especially since 1945, of a framework of global governance (see p. 462) and sometimes regional governance. This is reflected in the growing importance of organizations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (see p. 475), the World Trade Organization (WTO) (see p. 537), the European Union (see p. 509) and so on. The growing number and significance of international organizations has occurred for powerful and pressing reasons. Notably, they reflect the fact that states are increasingly confronted by **collective action problems**; issues that are particularly taxing because they confound even the most powerful of states when acting alone. This first became apparent in relation to the development of technologized warfare and particularly the invention of nuclear weapons, but has since been reinforced by challenges such as financial crises, pandemics, climate change, terrorism, crime, migration and development. Such trends, nevertheless, have yet to render the idea of international anarchy altogether redundant. While international organizations have undoubtedly become significant actors on the world stage, competing, at times, with states and other non-state actors, their impact should not be exaggerated. Apart from anything else, they are, to a greater or lesser extent, the creatures of their members: they can do no more than their member states, and especially powerful states, allow them to do.

**Collective action problems:** A problem that stems from the interdependence of states, meaning that any solution must involve international cooperation rather than action by a single state.

## GLOBAL ACTORS . . .

### NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a private, non-commercial group or body which seeks to achieve its ends through non-violent means. The World Bank (see p. 380) defines NGOs as ‘private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development’. Very early examples of such bodies were the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (formed by William Wilberforce in 1787) and the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded in 1863. The first official recognition of NGOs was by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, when 41 NGOs were granted consultative status following the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (indeed, some NGO activists believe that only groups formally acknowledged by the UN should be regarded as ‘true’ NGOs). A distinction is often drawn between operational NGOs and advocacy NGOs:

- *Operational* NGOs are those whose primary purpose is the design and implementation of development-related projects; they may be either relief-orientated or development-orientated, and they may be community-based, national or international.
- *Advocacy* NGOs exist to promote or defend a particular cause; they are sometimes termed ‘promotional pressure groups’ or ‘public interest groups’.

**Significance:** Since the 1990s, the steady growth in the number of NGOs has become a veritable explosion. By 2021 5,593 groups had been granted consultative status by the UN, with estimates suggesting a total of around 50 large (multi-country, multi-mandate) international NGOs and as many as 300,000 smaller internationally-focused NGOs globally. If national and local NGOs are taken into account, the number grows

enormously: as of 2021, the USA has an estimated 1.5 million NGOs; in 2017, Russia reportedly had 224,500 NGOs; and Kenya, to take one developing country alone, registered 11,262 new NGOs between 2001 and 2019. The major international NGOs have developed into huge organizations. For example, Care International, dedicated to the worldwide reduction of poverty, controls a budget worth more than 970m dollars, Greenpeace has a membership of 2.8m and a staff of over 2,400, and Amnesty International is better resourced than the human rights arm of the UN.

There can be little doubt that major international NGOs and the NGO sector as a whole now constitute significant actors on the global stage. Although lacking the economic leverage that TNCs can exert, advocacy NGOs have proved highly adept at mobilizing ‘soft’ power and popular pressure. In this respect, they have a number of advantages. These include that leading NGOs have cultivated high public profiles, often linked to public protests and demonstrations that attract eager media attention; that their typically altruistic and humanitarian objectives enable them to mobilize public support and exert moral pressure in a way that conventional politicians and political parties struggle to rival; and that, over a wide range of issues, the views of NGOs are taken to be both authoritative and disinterested, based on the use of specialists and academics. Operational NGOs, for their part, have come to deliver about 15 per cent of international aid, often demonstrating a greater speed of response and level of operational effectiveness than governmental bodies, national or international, can muster. Relief- and development-orientated NGOs may also be able to operate in politically sensitive areas where national governments, or even the UN, would be unwelcome.

Nevertheless, the rise of the NGO has provoked considerable political controversy. Supporters of NGOs argue that they benefit and enrich global politics. They counter-balance corporate power, challenging the influence of TNCs; democratize global politics by articulating the interests of people and groups who have been disempowered by the globalization process; and act as a moral force, widening people’s sense of civic responsibility and even promoting global citizenship. In these respects, they are a vital component of emergent global civil society (see p. 156). Critics, however, argue that NGOs are really self-appointed ‘pressure’ or ‘interest’ groups that have limited democratic credentials. NGOs have also faced criticism for cynical fund-raising and campaigning tactics, and for blunting the radical edge of social movements. Amid a series of recent scandals, some major Western international NGOs have been found to be

involved in sexual exploitation and violence in developing countries, and institutionally racist, bullying and abusive employment practices in their home countries, spawning the social media hashtag campaign #CharitySoWhite in 2019 (The impact and significance of NGOs is examined further in Chapter 6.)

## GLOBALIZATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

No development has challenged the conventional state-centric image of world politics more radically than the emergence of globalization. By the 1990s globalization had become a key ‘buzz word’ from the social sciences to politics and pop culture, although its use has been in decline since the mid-2000s. The twenty-first century was supposed to be the ‘global century’, but what is ‘globalization’? Is it actually happening, and, if so, what are its implications?

### CONCEPT

#### **Globalization**

Globalization is the emergence of a complex web of interconnected-ness that means that our lives are increasingly shaped by events that occur, and decisions that are made, at a great distance from us. The central feature of globalization is therefore that geographical distance is of declining relevance and that territorial borders, such as those between nation-states, are becoming less significant. By no means, however, does globalization imply that ‘the local’ and ‘the national’ are subordinated to ‘the global’. Rather, it highlights the *deepening* as well as the *broadening* of the political process, in the sense that local, national and global events (or perhaps local, regional, national, international and global events) constantly interact.

### **Defining and debating globalization**

Globalization is what W.B. Gallie (1956) would have called an ‘essentially contested concept’. That is to say that it has many definitions, some of which overlap and some of which conflict with one another. It has been variously defined as:

- ‘[T]he intensification of worldwide social relations that link distant localities in a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’ (Giddens 1990)
- ‘The integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment, short-term capital flows, international flows of workers and humanity generally, and flows of technology’ (Bhagwati 2004)
- ‘The processes through which sovereign nation-states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks’ (Beck 2000)
- ‘A process (or set of processes) which embody the transformation of the spatial organization of social relations and transactions’ (Held et al. 1999)
- ‘A reconfiguration of social geography marked by the growth of transplanetary and suprateritorial connections between people’ (Scholte 2005)
- ‘A process of time-space compression – literally a shrinking world – in which the sources of even very local developments, from unemployment to ethnic conflict, may be traced to distant conditions or decisions’ (McGrew 2010)
- [T]he fad of the 1990s, and [...] made in America (Waltz 1999)

Globalization is a complex, elusive and controversial term. Recent analysis of the literature on globalization has suggested its sometimes confused and contradictory definitions result from the tautology underpinning it: those who theorise globalisation often do so by reference to claims about the existence of ‘the global’ (Kamola 2013, 2019). ‘Globalization’ has been used to refer to a process, a policy, a marketing strategy, a predicament or even an ideology. Some have tried to bring greater clarity to the debate about the nature of globalization by distinguishing between globalization as a process or set of processes (highlighting the dynamics of transformation or change, in common with other words that end in the suffix ‘-ization’, such as modernization) and **globality** as a condition (indicating the set of circumstances that globalization has brought about, just as modernization has created a condition of modernity) (Steger 2003). The problem with defining globalization may be that it is not so much an ‘it’ as a ‘them’: it is not a single process but a complex of processes, sometimes overlapping and interlocking but also, at times, contradictory and oppositional. Nevertheless, the various developments and manifestations that are associated with globalization, or

indeed globality, can be traced back to the underlying phenomenon of interconnectedness between previously unconnected people and institutions. Held et al. (1999) thus defined globalization as ‘the widening, intensifying, speeding up, and growing impact of world-wide interconnectedness’.

**Globality:** A totally interconnected whole, such as the global economy; the social domain created by globalization.

Although globalization theorists have championed particular interpretations of globalization, these are by no means all mutually exclusive. Instead, they capture different aspects of a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Globalization has been interpreted in three main ways:

- *Economic* globalization (see p. 98) is the process through which national economies have, to a greater or lesser extent, been absorbed into a single global economy (examined in greater depth in Chapter 4).
- *Cultural* globalization (see p. 151) is the process whereby information, commodities and images that have been produced in one part of the world enter into a global flow that tends to ‘flatten out’ cultural differences between nations, regions and individuals (discussed more fully in Chapter 6).
- *Political* globalization (see p. 122) is the process through which policy-making responsibilities have been passed from national governments to international organizations (considered in greater detail in Chapter 5).

But is globalization actually happening? Although globalization has been a buzz word in the social sciences, and among politicians and journalists, for decades, its very existence remains open to question. The most influential early attempt to outline the various positions on this globalization debate was set out by Held et al. (1999). They distinguished between three positions:

- The hyperglobalists
- The sceptics
- The transformationalists.

**Hyperglobalism** is arguably something of an intellectual ‘straw man’, since its rather extreme position – that globalization makes the state obsolete – is found more often in arguments against globalization theory than it is as a coherent theoretical position of its own. In fact, the one text that is almost always mentioned in the same breath as hyperglobalism is Kenich Ohmae’s (1990) *The Borderless World*. *The Borderless World* is a book aimed at corporate managers, but nevertheless became treated as a serious work of globalization theory, if only because its central arguments are easily refutable. Ohmae argued that the globalization of trade, led by the ‘Triad’ of the US, Europe and Japan, meant that ‘national borders have effectively disappeared’ between these countries. Even in the 1990s this claim was hyperbolic, but in the twenty-first century, with the reassertion of state power through the ‘War on Terror’ (see p. XXX), the rise of anti-immigration politics and increasingly tough and complex immigration regimes, it is impossible to sustain.

**Hyperglobalism:** The view that new, globalized economic and cultural patterns became inevitable as a result of fast-paced information and communication technological (ICT) innovations in the twentieth century, and that globalization makes states obsolete, producing a ‘borderless world’.

Globalization skeptics for their part, including many Marxist (see p. XXX) and realist (see p. XXX) thinkers, argue that globalization either does not exist at all, or that it is not what hyperglobalists and other globalists think it is. Hirst and Thompson (1999) argue that claims about ‘economic globalization’, in particular, do not stand up to scrutiny, since ‘free’ transnational capital flows tend to be amongst major powers in general and USA-Europe-Japan ‘Triad’ in particular. Realist skeptics, on the other hand, emphasise the fact that what liberal globalists and hyperglobalists call ‘globalization’ may actually be simply expressions of America’s global ‘hegemonic’ power (see p. XXX). On this view, it is US-dominated capital and US interests that benefit, from the outsourcing of manufacture from West to East, to the influence of the international organisations that carry out ‘global governance’. For realists, an iron fist of military might lies within the velvet glove of ‘globalization’ talk; as Kenneth Waltz (see p. XXX) noted of the fevered globalization theories and predictions that followed the end of the Cold War: ‘America continues to garrison much of the world and to look for ways of keeping troops in foreign countries’ (Waltz 2000).

‘Transformationalists’, meanwhile, are supposed to represent a ‘third way’ between those who embrace and those who reject claims about globalization. A transformationalist position on globalization admits that there have been profound changes – transformations – as a result of technological innovation and increased interconnectedness, but take care to specify these changes closely rather than bundling them up as ‘globalization’.

### **Anti-globalization politics**

Globalization has been subject not only to intellectual critiques by those who would suggest it does not exist, or is not what we think it is, but has also been opposed in practice by a range of global political movements and actors opposed to its perceived ill-effects. There have been two broad trends in this politics of anti-globalization. The first is associated loosely with the transnational political Left: activists, politicians, and NGOs arguing that globalization is really an intensification of the exploitation and violence done to working class and marginalised people, and to the environment, around the world. The second is associated with a broadly right-wing tradition that can, ironically, be characterised as a ‘transnational nationalist’ movement. This right-wing movement opposes the immigration and racial mixing enabled by globalization, and laments how particular social groups it identifies with ‘the nation’ have ‘lost out’ or been ‘left behind’ by economic globalization.

#### **Left-wing anti-globalization**

The first wave of left-wing anti-globalization politics coalesced around mass demonstrations against the institutions of ‘global governance’ (see p. XXX) at the turn of the millennium. Precipitated by the Zapatista uprising in Mexico in the mid-1990s (see p. XXX), this transnational social movement was partly enabled by the rise of the Internet, which provided new channels for activist organisation and the planning and promotion of direct action and protest. Major demonstrations included those against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at the ‘Battle of Seattle’ in 1999, and at the ‘Group of Eight’ major economies (G-8) meeting in Genoa in 2001. Each of these

demonstrations attracted many tens of thousands of protestors from around the world, campaigning across a huge range of issues, from ecological protection to the need to replace capitalism with a more humane economic system. This movement was associated with the World Social Forum (WSF), an alternative to the World Economic Forum (WEF), which was seen as a key global governance institution bringing the global economic and political elite together in Davos, Switzerland each year to discuss the future of the global economy. The WSF has instead met each year from 2001 in the ‘Global South’ (see p. XXX), initially in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and brings together activists concerned with achieving ‘global social justice’ for workers, marginalised and minoritised groups, indigenous peoples, and the natural environment. As the movement developed in the 2000s and 2010s it became more closely associated with ‘alter-globalisations’ – recognising that globalisation may be both inevitable and a force for good, but emphasising that the US-led, corporate, culturally homogenising, and violently militaristic model of globalisation, associated with undemocratic and unaccountable elites and their global governance institutions, is the ‘wrong’ kind of globalization. This broadly left-wing anti-globalisation movement instead advocates more open global immigration regime, or even an end to national borders altogether, more global cooperation to slow or reverse climate change and environmental degradation, and global cross-racial and working-class solidarities. After the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis, a series of related global movements and demonstrations emerged to contest the targeting of the crisis’s costs at vulnerable populations in the form of ‘austerity’ policies, often mirroring or overlapping the left-wing anti/alter-globalization movement. These included the anti-austerity ‘Indignados’ movement in Spain, the ‘Occupy’ movements, beginning with Occupy Wall Street, in 2011 and spreading to cities around the world, and the rise of leftist anti-austerity parties like Syriza, which was elected to government in Greece in 2015. Between 2015 and 2020, left-wing veterans of the anti/alter-globalization and anti-austerity movements, including the US Senator Bernie Sanders and the British MP Jeremy Corbyn, became ‘mainstream’ political leaders in their respective national legislatures, although both ultimately failed in their ambitions to be elected to government.

### **Right-wing anti-globalization**

The right-wing anti-globalization movement emerged as a relatively coherent, though less united and coordinated, global network much more recently. While the idea of transnational nationalist solidarity might appear contradictory or oxymoronic, given the investment of nationalist groups in ‘their’ respective national identities, and their hostility to foreigners, the situation is not so simple. In fact, historically-speaking, nationalists have been at least as oriented toward transnational organising and solidarity as liberal and left-wing global actors – think of the alliances and collaborations between Germany, Italy, and Spain when those three countries were under fascist rule, for example, and of the ‘Axis’ powers’ alliance in the Second World War (see p. XXX). In the 2010s, parallel to the anti/alter-globalization Left’s anti-austerity movement, there emerged an increasingly widespread and successful transnational right-wing movement, which argued against globalization and especially against ‘globalism’ (see p. XXX). These consisted of local, national, and regional-level movements in Europe and North America, including organisations and political parties like the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain, *Alternatif fur Deutshland* (AfD) in Germany, *Generazione Identitaria* (Generation Identity) in Italy, and the movement around the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump in the USA. Outside of the ‘West’ (see p. XXX), similar movements emerged around the political leadership of Narendra Modi in India and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. While, like those involved in left-wing anti-globalisation movements, these global political actors differ over the details of precise political goals and methods, they are united by the claims that ‘their’ people have lost out in various ways through globalization and liberal, globalist policy, and by their advocacy of racially or ‘ethnically’ defined concepts of national identity. Their politics at both the national and the global level tends to centre on the demonization of the political Left, and of racialized, gendered and sexual minorities, and especially on opposition to ‘mass’ immigration. If the first wave of left-wing anti-globalisation politics was enabled by the dawn of the Internet – a technology so shrewdly exploited by the Zapatistas and other parts of the anti-capitalist Left – then the more right-wing turn against globalization could not have happened without social media. The transformative effects of social media, as Internet content began to be created by individual users rather than predominantly by big businesses, were so dramatic that the term ‘Web 2.0’ was coined to describe the new social media model. Political organising and political argument in general became core features of social media, with platforms like Twitter becoming especially politicised. While both Left and Right organise and

propagandise through social media, the transnational anti-globalization Right was really born through these platforms, which allowed disparate and distant right-wing activists to communicate and organise around the shared views discussed above, across their otherwise very different national and local contexts.

### **Globalism, worlding, and worldism: imagining global politics**

A popular slogan associated with the first wave of anti-globalisation movements (see p. XXX) was ‘think global, act local’. This emphasised the need for people to be conscious of globalisation (and what its critics view as the exploitation and inequality it perpetuates and extends), but to direct their anti-globalization activism at their local contexts. Apart from the comparatively straightforward case for studying the global as a ‘domain’ of politics, on the grounds that the national, regional, and international domains no longer capture everything that constitutes ‘the political’, there is a wider question around what it means to ‘think global’. It is now widely argued that one of the key drivers of globalisation and the emergence of ‘the global’ as a political space is imagination. This doesn’t mean that global politics are not ‘real’, but rather that the increased focus on the global is the result of an imaginative shift in societies across the world, from the level of our own local and national contexts – the things that matter to us at a relatively ‘micro’ level – to more ‘macro’-level imaginaries.

Studying *global* politics is, in this sense, first of all about ‘thinking international relations differently’ (Tickner and Blaney, 2012), moving away from the traditional focus on *inter-state* relations. Isaac Kamola (2019) argues that the process of ‘making the world global’, which consists first of all in the social construction (see p. XXX) of a ‘global imaginary’, is closely linked to the rise of neoliberalism (see p. XXX) in the 1980s and 1990s. The rise of ‘the global’, on this view, results from the increasing influence of multinational corporations, university business schools, international financial institutions, and politicians advocating market-driven politics, all of whom pushed a ‘**globalist**’ way of seeing the political that was attached to their particular vision of the global economy.

**[THEORIST] L.H.M. Ling (1955-2018)**



L.H.M. (Lily) Ling became a highly influential scholar of postcolonial international relations theory (see p. XXX) in the early twenty-first century. Ling's work challenged many of the dominant, 'traditional' understandings of global politics in the West, including what she called 'Westphalia world' – the view that the world consists of a lot of territorially-bounded states of various sizes and capabilities interacting with one another under conditions of anarchy. Importantly, whereas this vision of global politics was rooted in exclusively Western sources, from Thucydides and Thomas Hobbes to Immanuel Kant, Ling's 'worldist' alternative drew also upon Chinese sources, including Daoist philosophical texts and dialectical reasoning. Ling was also a feminist scholar, contributing to 'non-Western' feminist thinking on international relations. In a 2015 interview Ling said: 'I am a product of both East and West. Growing up in this hybrid space has allowed me to see the possibilities and drawbacks of both traditions; [...] to syncretize the best of both worlds, thereby leaving behind the worst of each'. Her key works include *Postcolonial International Relations: Conquest and Desire Between Asia and the West* (2002), *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (2009, with Anna M. Agathangelou), *The Dao of World Politics* (2013), and *Imagining World Politics* (2014).

Figure: An extract from the Hereford 'Mappa Mundi' (1280 AD), one of the first renderings of a European 'global imaginary'. The map included places roughly equivalent to Europe, Asia and North Africa, but not the Americas, which Europeans were yet to have any contact with at this point.

To think globally when we think about politics is to imagine the world *as a world*, rather than simply as a set of states interacting in a system (see the 'billiard ball' model, p. XXX). But this imaginative shift is not necessarily a 'natural', neutral, or inevitable process, simply reflecting the emergence of the global as a 'new' space or domain of politics, and our need to understand and explain it. Thinking globally is rather about adopting a particular worldview or 'ontology' (see p. XXX) of social relations – including politics – and one which, as much as any other perspective on the social, is rooted in our own more local contexts. One of the big questions that this chapter will return to is the extent to which it is possible to truly 'think globally', given the profoundly different cultural and social contexts that exist in the world, into which we are all born and by which we are all conditioned and constrained to think in particular, rather than universal, ways. For example, it has been pointed out that in major Western studies of globalisation, and 'globalist' theories, Africa either does not feature at all or, where it is discussed, it is 'almost always as a problem' (Kamola, 2012: p. 183). The Western globalist imaginary therefore tends to deny African people agency and significance in the making of the global world.

We must recognise that the 'global imaginary' might be very different for, say, Chinese and American people, or Europeans and Africans, while there will also likely be significant divergence over the meaning of the global *within* those national and regional groupings. In recent years 'postcolonial' (see p. XXX) thinkers have proposed alternate paradigms to the 'globalist' vision, which is itself closely associated with a Western – and especially North American – imaginary of the world. The concept of '**worlding**'

has been used to describe the ways in which different societies imagine global politics, while L.H.M. Ling (1955-2018) uses the term ‘**worldism**’, or ‘the theory of Multiple Worlds’, to describe the existence of a plurality of visions of the world, among which Western globalism is but one (Ling, 2013). *Particular* people and societies often seek to impose a *universal* global imaginary on the world, based on their local, national, and / or regional experiences, including their more ‘internal’ and spiritual life and imagination. Ling offers an alternative to Western models, rooted in the Chinese philosophical traditions of Daoism, along with the Chinese intellectual traditions bequeathed by the philosopher Confucius (551 BCE – 479 BCE) and the strategist Sun Tzu (544 BCE – 496 BCE). She shows that through these different lenses, the nature and behaviour of people, societies, the earth, and thus also ‘the global’, can be seen very differently than it is through the Western paradigm. Among other things, this alternate vision of the global does not necessitate viewing the ‘rise of China’ in world order as the intrinsic ‘threat’ it has been represented as by Western, liberal, globalist rhetoric.

**Globalism** The belief – most closely associated with liberal thought (see p. XXX) – that globalization is an inevitable and benevolent force in the world, modernising, developing, and ultimately integrating the world’s many societies.

**Worlding** The process by which different societies construct their imaginaries of the world, including how they envisage its structure and constituent parts, such as which are the key global actors and processes.

**Worldism** A theory of ‘multiple worlds’ – the differing global visions which have emerged from the different local, national and regional processes of worlding.

## LENSES ON GLOBAL POLITICS

Making sense of global politics also requires that we understand the theories, values and assumptions through which world affairs have been interpreted. How do different analysts and theorists see the world? What are the key ‘lenses’ on global politics? The theoretical dimension of the study of global politics has become an increasingly rich and diverse arena in recent decades. The substantive ideas of the growing range of theoretical traditions are examined in Chapters 3 and 4. This introduction, nevertheless,

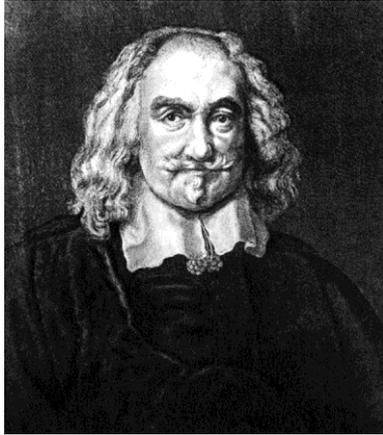
attempts to map out broad areas of debate among the traditions, in particular by distinguishing between ‘traditional’ perspectives and ‘critical’ perspectives.

## **Traditional perspectives**

The two ‘traditional’ perspectives on global politics are realism and liberalism. What do they have in common, and in what sense are they ‘traditional’? Realism and liberalism can be viewed as mainstream perspectives in the sense that they, in their various incarnations, have dominated conventional academic approaches within the discipline or field of ‘international relations’ (IR) theory. They are also ‘traditional’ in the sense attributed to ‘traditional theory’ by Max Horkheimer (see p. XXX), offering explanations and predictions about global politics that tend to reproduce or ‘explain away’ the *status quo* of existing world order. Realist and liberal theories have two broad things in common. In the first place, they are both – in their contemporary forms – grounded in **positivism**. This suggests that it is possible to develop objective knowledge, through the capacity to distinguish ‘facts’ from ‘values’. In short, it is possible to compare theories with the ‘real world’, the world ‘out there’. Robert Cox (1981) thus describes such theories as ‘problem-solving theories’, in that they take the world ‘as it is’ and endeavour to think through problems and offer prudent advice to policy-makers trying to negotiate the challenges of the ‘real world’. (These issues are discussed in greater detail in pp. 527–30.) Second, realist and liberal theorists share similar concerns and address similar issues, meaning that they, in effect, talk to, rather than past, one another. In particular, the core concern of both realism and liberalism is the balance between conflict and cooperation in state relations. Although realists generally place greater emphasis on conflict, while liberals highlight the scope for cooperation, neither is unmindful of the issues raised by the other, as is evidenced in the tendency, over time, for differences between realism and liberalism to have become blurred (see *Closing the realist–liberal divide?* p. 68). Nevertheless, important differences can be identified between the realist and liberal perspectives.

**Positivism:** The theory that social and indeed all forms of enquiry should conform to the methods of the natural sciences (see p. 526).

<b>[THEORIST] Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)</b>
---



English political philosopher. Hobbes was the son of a minor clergyman who subsequently abandoned his family. Writing at a time of uncertainty and civil strife, precipitated by the English Revolution, Hobbes theorised human nature, and explored its social and political implications, chiefly in his great work, *Leviathan* (1651). Here Hobbes extrapolated from his philosophical belief – influenced by his French contemporary and interlocutor, the philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) – that human beings are fundamentally wired to avoid pain and to seek out pleasure. Hobbes argued that this motivates people to accumulate *power*, which enables the avoidance of painful experiences and the proliferation of pleasant ones. Human nature is thus the seeking of ‘power after power’, and life in what Hobbes called the ‘state of nature’ would be violently selfish, ‘nasty, brutish and short’. For this reason, the *sovereign* power of the state and government are required to protect us from ourselves and one another.

How do realists see global politics? Deriving from ideas that can be traced back to thinkers such as Thucydides (see p. 249), Sun Tzu, author of *The Art of War*, Machiavelli (see p. 58) and Thomas Hobbes, the realist vision is pessimistic: international politics is marked by constant power struggles and conflict, and a wide range of obstacles standing in the way of peaceful cooperation. Realism is grounded in an emphasis on **power politics**, based on the following assumptions:

- Human nature is characterized by selfishness and greed.
- Politics is a domain of human activity structured by power and coercion.
- States are the key global actors.
- States pursue self-interest and survival, prioritizing security above all else.
- States operate in a context of anarchy, and thus rely on self-help.

- Global order is structured by the distribution of power (capabilities) among states.
- The balance of power is the principal means of ensuring stability and avoiding war.
- Ethical considerations are (and should be) irrelevant to the conduct of foreign policy.

**Power politics:** An approach to politics based on the assumption that the pursuit of power is the principal human goal; the term is sometimes used descriptively.

By contrast, how do liberals see global politics? Liberalism offers a more optimistic vision of global politics, based, ultimately, on a belief in human rationality and moral goodness (even though liberals also accept that people are essentially self-interested and competitive). Liberals tend to believe that the principle of balance or harmony operates in all forms of social interaction. As far as world politics is concerned, this is reflected in a general commitment to **internationalism**, as reflected in Immanuel Kant's (see p. 15) belief in the possibility of 'universal and perpetual peace'. The liberal model of global politics is based on the following key assumptions:

- Human beings are rational and moral creatures.
- History is a progressive process, characterized by a growing prospect of international cooperation and peace.
- Mixed-actor models of global politics are more realistic than state-centric ones.
- Trade and economic interdependence make war less likely.
- International law helps to promote order and fosters rule-governed behaviour among states.
- Democracy is inherently peaceful, particularly in reducing the likelihood of war between democratic states.

**Internationalism:** The theory or practice of politics based on cooperation or harmony among nations, as opposed to the transcendence of national politics (see p. 67).

[THEORIST] Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)



German philosopher. Kant spent his entire life in Königsberg (which was then in East Prussia), becoming professor of logic and metaphysics at the University of Königsberg in 1770. His ‘critical’ philosophy (see p. XXX) holds that knowledge is not merely an aggregate of sense impressions; it depends on the ‘*a priori*’ conceptual apparatus of human understanding, which precedes our experiences. Kant’s political thought was shaped by the central importance of morality, and is closely associated with ‘Enlightenment’ thinking and ‘universalist’ claims about our rights and obligations. That said, despite his arguments for the ‘cosmopolitanism’ (global citizenship) of political communities, Kant is now viewed also as a variety of ‘scientific racist’ for writings in which he sought to intellectually establish the cultural superiority of white Europeans over Asians and Africans. Kant’s most influential works include *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1784), *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), and *To Perpetual Peace: a Philosophical Sketch* (1795).

### Critical perspectives

Since the late 1980s, the range of critical approaches to world affairs has expanded considerably. Until that point, Marxism had constituted the principal alternative to mainstream realist and liberal theories. What made the Marxist approach distinctive was that it placed its emphasis not on patterns of conflict and cooperation between states, but on structures of economic power and the role played in world affairs by international capital. It thus brought international political economy, sometimes seen as a sub-field within IR (see p. XXX), into focus. However, hastened by the end of the Cold War, a wide range of ‘new voices’ started to influence the study of world politics, notable examples including social constructivism, critical theory, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminism and green politics. What do these new critical voices have in

common, and in what sense are they ‘critical’? In view of their diverse philosophical underpinnings and contrasting political viewpoints, it is tempting to argue that the only thing that unites these ‘new voices’ is a shared antipathy towards traditional thinking. However, two broad similarities can be identified. The first is that, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, they have tried to go beyond the positivism of traditional theory, emphasizing instead the role of consciousness in shaping social conduct and, therefore, world affairs. These so-called post-positivist theories are therefore ‘critical’ in that they not only take issue with the conclusions of traditional theory, but also subject these theories themselves to critical scrutiny, exposing biases that operate within them and examining their implications. The second similarity is linked to the first: critical perspectives are ‘critical’ in that, in their different ways, they oppose the dominant forces and interests in modern world affairs, and so contest the global status quo by (usually) aligning themselves with marginalized or oppressed groups. Each of them, thus, seeks to uncover inequalities and asymmetries that traditional theories tend to ignore.

However, the inequalities and asymmetries to which critical theorists have drawn attention are many and various:

- Postcolonial thinkers have highlighted the historical centrality of colonialism to producing our present world order, and the ways in which its intellectual legacies – including racism, as a system of both structural inequality and belief or ideology – continue to shape global politics today.
- Feminists have drawn attention to systematic and pervasive structures of gender inequality that characterize global and, indeed, all other forms of politics. In particular, they have highlighted the extent to which mainstream, and especially realist, theories are based on ‘masculinist’ assumptions about rivalry, competition and inevitable conflict.
- Marxists (who encompass a range of traditions and tendencies that in fact straddle the positivist–post-positivist divide) highlight inequalities in the global capitalist system, through which developed countries or areas, sometimes operating through TNCs or linked to ‘hegemonic’ powers such as the USA, dominate and exploit working class populations overseas just as they do at home.
- Poststructuralists emphasize that all ideas and concepts are expressed in language which itself is enmeshed in complex relations of power. Influenced particularly by the writings of Michel Foucault (see p. XXX), poststructuralists have drawn

attention to the link between power and knowledge using the concept of ‘discourse’.

- Constructivists have thrown traditional theory’s claim to objectivity into question, in arguing that people, in effect, ‘construct’ the world in which they live, suggesting that the world operates through a kind of ‘inter-subjective’ awareness. Constructivism is not so much a substantive theory as an analytical tool.
- A range of new critical theoretical approaches have emerged in the early twenty-first century, drawing on insights from ‘green’ or ecological theory, and sociological theories focused on the ‘materiality’ of social practices, the relationship between ‘actors’ and ‘networks’ in global politics, and the role of ‘necropolitics’ – the politics of death – in the epoch known as the ‘Anthropocene’.

**[THEORIST] Michel Foucault (1926–84)**



French philosopher and radical intellectual. Foucault was initially a member of the French Communist Party (PCF), and remained a life-long political activist, though his academic work turned away from Marxism and toward what came to be called ‘poststructuralism’. His books and popular public lectures, which ranged over the histories of madness, of medicine, of punishment, of sexuality and of knowledge itself, proceeded on the basis that ‘universal’ truths about such subjects do not exist, and that instead we should understand these fields as ‘discourses’: structured ways of representing the world and interacting in it. This suggests that power relations can largely be disclosed by examining the structure of knowledge, since ‘truth serves the interests of a ruling class or the prevailing power-structure’. Foucault’s most important works include *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (1969).

## **APPROACHES TO ... THE 2020 GLOBAL CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

### ***Realist view***

Realists are state-centric thinkers. They are skeptical about globalization in general, and about the notion that it reduces the power and significance of states as global political actors in particular. Following the outbreak of the global Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic in early 2020, one of the most prominent American realists, Stephen Walt, suggested that the virus showed that ‘the high water mark of contemporary globalization is now behind us’. Drawing on the classical realist source, Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* (see p. XXX), which describes the effects of a lethal plague on the international relations of Athens with its neighbouring city-states, Walt argues that the more recent pandemic ‘reminds us that states are still the main actors in global politics’. Realists also suggest that the pandemic crisis will likely contribute, in the longer term, to what they see as the decline of the trends others have labelled ‘globalization’, and that a consequence of the pandemic will be, in Walt’s words: ‘borders between states will become a bit higher’.

### ***Liberal view***

Liberals, who generally embrace globalization as a real and necessary process, that they believe will lead to greater security and stability in the world, were frustrated by state responses to the global coronavirus pandemic, but hopeful for a solution through global governance. For liberals, institutions like the World Health Organisation (see p. XXX) are central to the ‘liberal world order’, and were designed precisely to provide the necessary governance to guide societies through crises like this. Alleged state secrecy around the scale of risk the pandemic posed, first in China and then elsewhere, was, on the liberal view, the enemy of effective solutions. More open, democratic, global cooperation is the only means to solve collective action problems (see p. XXX) like a pandemic, from the liberal perspective. As the virus spread in 2020, the influential American ‘neoliberal institutionalist’ (see p. XXX), Joseph Nye, argued that: ‘On transnational threats like COVID-19 and climate change, it is not enough to think of American power over other nations. The key to success is also learning the importance

of power with others. Every country puts its national interest first; the important question is how broadly or narrowly this interest is defined. COVID-19 shows we are failing to adjust our strategy to this new world’.

### ***Postcolonial view***

From a postcolonial perspective, the global pandemic threw into even sharper relief the structural inequalities that globalization has failed to resolve, or has even exacerbated. Like the global financial crisis that struck thirteen years earlier, the societies that were positioned to be highly vulnerable were those with weaker economies and infrastructure. These societies, largely located in the ‘Global South’ (see p. XXX) are, for the most part, countries that were once subjected to European colonialism (see p. XXX), a major cause of their relative economic and infrastructural problems. As it transpired, powerful ‘Global North’ countries with major economies also suffered greatly, with Italy, the USA, and the UK seeing among the very highest proportions of deaths from the virus in the world. But postcolonial analysis would point to the internal dynamics within these states, where – especially in the USA and UK – official statistics showed that those racialized as minorities were far more likely to die from the virus than the white majority. Similarly, evidence unequivocally showed that people living in poorer and working-class neighbourhoods in these countries were far more likely to die from the virus than their wealthier compatriots, a point that would not be lost on postcolonial theorists, who view race and class as mutually constituted or ‘intersectional’ (see p. XXX) social characteristics. Postcolonial thinkers like Gurminder Bhambra noted that disproportionate deaths among people racialized as minorities in the West correlated to their over-representation in frontline health and care work, itself a colonial legacy.

### ***Marxist view***

For Marxists, the pandemic is another crisis of capitalism, and one that starkly highlights the structural violence done in the name of capitalist ‘globalization’. The American Marxist historian Mike Davis published a book 15 years prior to the global pandemic, warning that global pharmaceutical corporations neglect vaccine research as ‘unprofitable’, while the rise of factory farming and ‘megaslums’ provide fertile conditions for a new global plague. Capitalism is an economic system driven by the profit motive alone and, in the Marxist view, has something of a track record in

degrading, endangering and extinguishing human life in the pursuit of profit. In 2020 , Davis suggested that: ‘This new age of plagues, like previous pandemic epochs, is directly the result of economic globalization’, since it was the global interconnectedness necessitated by capitalist markets, industry and trade, that spread the virus.

### ***Constructivist and poststructuralist views***

From both constructivist and poststructuralist perspectives, the global pandemic is of interest in the way that it is interpreted and acted-upon by states and non-state actors in global politics. The dominant ‘symbolic order’ of global politics has tended to prioritise military forms of ‘security’ as the ultimate concern of such actors, depicting issues like terrorism as the most significant threats. For example, Dan Stevens and Nick Vaughan-Williams noted that while the UK’s National Security Strategy had listed pandemics as a key threat since at least 2010, this perception was not shared by the public, and in any case no equivalent funding or infrastructure was forthcoming to deal with pandemics to that surrounding the ‘War on Terror’ (see p. XXX). ‘Discourses’ on the pandemic (see p. XXX), meanwhile, have been militarised or ‘securitised’, with politicians and media outlets depicting the virus as an ‘invisible enemy’, and the global response as a ‘war’ or ‘battle’, underlining the poststructuralist emphasis on language as the medium of politics. Furthermore, power in the pandemic age is determined not only by military might and what the realists call the ‘distribution of coercive capabilities’, but clearly also by *knowledge*: scientific knowledge of the virology and epidemiology, of vaccines and ventilators, and social knowledge of how people tend to behave and how this behaviour can be governed to reduce risk.

### ***Feminist view***

The pandemic was significant in a number of ways for feminist thinkers. It highlighted, first of all, the fact that a ‘human security’ lens, rather than narrowly state-centric approaches to security, is necessitated by globalisation. Feminists stress the need for security to be viewed in a more ‘human’, less state-centric and militaristic way. How ‘secure’ is a society in which women and girls are routinely, systematically, sexually abused, confined to the home, and even murdered in incidents of domestic violence? ‘Femicide’ projects, tasking themselves with counting women’s deaths, have pointed

out that women in countries like the USA and UK are far more likely to be murdered by their partner or a male family member than they are a terrorist, and so suggested that a better security policy would prioritise tackling violence against women and girls. Relatedly, the pandemic itself intensified such violence, with a global surge in reports of domestic abuse as women and girls were ‘locked down’ at home with abusive partners and families. Feminists concerned with gender and sexuality also expressed concern at the impact of the pandemic on transgender people. Some places, such as Panama City, Panama, operated gendered lockdown policies, where men and women were allowed outside at separate times, and transgender people were subject to harassment and abuse. In other countries, from Kenya and the USA, transgender people suffered as hormone treatments and gender reassignment surgeries were deprioritised in favour of pandemic-related healthcare. From a feminist perspective, this sort of reprioritisation is a result of patriarchy (see p. XXX) and prevailing ‘heteronormative’ values, in which women’s, girls’, and LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual) people’s needs are systematically accorded less significance than ‘cisnet’ (cisgendered – i.e. of the gender assigned at birth – and heterosexual, men). Black feminist thinkers, meanwhile, including Kimberle Crenshaw (see p. XXX) highlighted the intersectional nature of racialized and gendered experiences of the global pandemic.

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN GLOBAL POLITICS

While global politics is an ever-shifting field, it is also characterised by certain key continuities. Dramatic, globally-significant events of recent decades, from the fall of the Berlin Wall (see p. XXX) and 9/11 (see p. XXX) to the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic (see p. XXX), can change the course of national foreign policies, and the domestic political and economic fortunes of states. These events may re-shape international organisations and the institutions of global governance, and even the fabric of societies themselves. But certain key themes remain relevant to any analysis of global politics. **World order** persists as a fundamental goal or principle informing much global political activity. Indeed, Cedric J. Robinson (1980) identifies the ‘myth of order’ as the defining feature of the Western notion of the political, and ideas about ‘world order’ continue to shape much of the theory and practice of global politics today.

The related concept of **security**, and its obverse – insecurity – looms large over debates on international relations in a global political age, just as it did before the concept of globalisation emerged. Similarly long-standing concerns about social **justice**, and concomitant concerns with rights, equality and inequalities, remain equally pertinent in a global era. And above all **power** – arguably the essence of politics itself – in all of its locations and distributions, is at stake in all discussions of global politics, including those on order, security and justice.

**World order** The perceived hierarchy of states in the world, which varies according to when, where and whom the ‘orderer’ is, and tends to relate to perceived economic, political, cultural, and military power.

**Security** In a global political system where states remain among the most important actors, security – the condition states are supposed to be able to provide for citizens – looms large in politics and policy, while insecurity arguably remains a pervasive feature.

**Justice** Any analysis of global politics reveals differences and inequalities within and between societies, and this leads on to questions of fairness and justice. Alter-globalisation movements (see p. XXX), for instance, fight for ‘global social justice’.

**Power** can be conceived of in several ways, including the ability to make others do what we want done, the ability to set political agendas and define what is seen to be possible, or as productive ‘empowerment’ – becoming able to speak and act for oneself.

## **GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .**

### **9/11 and global (in)security**

**Events:** On the morning of 11 September 2001, a coordinated series of terrorist attacks were launched against the USA using four hijacked passenger jet airliners (the events

subsequently became known as ‘9/11’). Two airliners crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, leading to the collapse first of the North Tower and then the South Tower. The third airliner crashed into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the US Department of Defence in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington DC. The fourth airliner, believed to be heading towards either the White House or the US Capitol, both in Washington DC, crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, apparently following passenger action to stop the attack. There were no survivors from any of the flights. A total of 2,995 people were killed in these attacks, mainly in New York City. In a videotape released in October 2001, responsibility for the attacks was claimed by Osama bin Laden, head of the al-Qaeda (see p. 301) organization, who praised his followers as the ‘vanguards of Islam’.

**Significance:** 9/11 has sometimes been described as ‘the day the world changed’. This certainly applied in terms of its consequences, notably the unfolding ‘war on terror’ and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and their ramifications. It also marked a dramatic shift in global security, signalling the end of a period during which globalization and the cessation of superpower rivalry appeared to have been associated with a diminishing propensity for international conflict. Globalization appeared to have ushered in new security threats and new forms of conflict. For example, 9/11 demonstrated how fragile national borders had become in a technological age. If the world’s greatest power could be dealt such a devastating blow to its largest city and its national capital, what chance did other states have? Further, the ‘external’ threat in this case came not from another state, but from a terrorist organization, and one, moreover, that operated more as a global network than a nationally-based organization. The motivations behind the attacks were also not conventional ones. Instead of seeking to conquer territory or acquire control over resources, the 9/11 attacks were carried out in the name of a religiously-inspired ideology, and revenge for US foreign policy outside the West, and aimed at exerting a symbolic, even psychic, blow against the cultural, political and ideological domination of the West.



However, rather than marking the beginning of a new era in global security, 9/11 may have indicated more a return to ‘business as normal’. In particular, the advent of a globalized world appeared to underline the vital importance of ‘national’ security, rather than ‘international’ or ‘global’ security. The emergence of new security challenges, and especially transnational terrorism, re-emphasized the core role of the state in protecting its citizens from external attack. Instead of becoming progressively less important, 9/11 gave the state a renewed significance. The USA, for example, responded to 9/11 by undertaking a substantial build-up of state power, both at home (through strengthened ‘homeland security’) and abroad (through increased military spending and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq). A unilateralist tendency also became more pronounced in its foreign policy, as the USA became, for a period at least, less concerned about working with or through international organizations of various kinds. Other states affected by terrorism have also exhibited similar tendencies, marking a renewed emphasis on national security sometimes at the expense of considerations such as civil liberties and political freedom. In other words, 9/11 may demonstrate that state-based power politics is alive and kicking.

While there have been many dramatic events and changes in the first decades of the twenty-first century, from 9/11 to the global coronavirus pandemic, struggles for power, security, world order, and justice remain the key forces behind global politics. How can we theorise, explain and understand global politics? How does the global economy work, and for whom does it work best? What roles can states and non-state actors play in a globalised world? Is war a permanent feature of international relations? How important are international organisations to world order? And how are social

structures and identities of gender and ‘race’ at stake in global politics? These questions, which continue to animate global politics, are all about power, security, world order, and justice. And they are just some of the key questions explored throughout the remainder of this book.

## **USING THIS BOOK**

Global politics is, by its nature, an overlapping and interlocking field. The material encountered in this book stubbornly resists compartmentalization, which is why, throughout, there is regular cross-referencing to related discussions that occur in other chapters and particularly to relevant boxed material found elsewhere. Nevertheless, the book develops by considering what can be thought of as a series of broad issues or themes.

The first group of chapters is designed to provide background understanding for the study of global politics.

- This chapter has examined the nature of global politics and considered the developments that make a global politics approach to world affairs appropriate, as well as providing an introduction to contrasting mainstream and critical perspectives on global politics.
- Chapter 2 examines the historical context of modern global politics, particularly by looking at key developments in world history during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
- Chapter 3 outlines key ‘traditional’ theoretical approaches to global politics. These influential accounts remain central to many commonplace concepts we use when we talk about the international and the global today, from anarchy and security to conflict and cooperation.
- Chapter 4 introduces a set of ‘critical’ theories of global politics. These popular and increasingly ‘mainstream’ approaches challenge the traditional theories and practices of global politics, and invite us to consider our own positions as theorists and analysts involved embedded in the social and political practices we study.

The next group of chapters discusses the various transformations that have occurred, and are occurring, as a result of the globalization of world politics.

- Chapter 5 discusses the nature, extent and implications of economic globalization, and considers, amongst other things, the crisis tendencies within modern global capitalism.
- Chapter 6 examines the role and significance of the state in a global age, as well as the nature of foreign policy and how foreign policy decisions are made.
- Chapter 7 considers the social implications of globalization and whether or not it is possible to talk of an emergent global civil society.
- Chapter 8 examines the ways in which nations and nationalisms have been shaped and reshaped in a global world, including the ways in which nationalism has been both weakened and strengthened.
- Chapter 9 examines the significance of identity culture to politics in a global age..

The following group of chapters considers the broad themes of global order and conflict.

- Chapter 10 looks at the nature of global power and the changing shape of twenty-first century world order, as well as at the implications of such changes for peace and stability.
- Chapter 11 examines how and why wars occur, the changing nature of warfare, and how, and how successfully, war has been justified.
- Chapter 12 considers the nature and implications of weapons of mass destruction, and their impact on global politics past and present.
- Chapter 13 discusses the nature of terrorism, the various debates that have sprung up about its significance and the strategies that have been used to counter it.

The next group of chapters focuses on various issues to do with the theme of global justice.

- Chapter 14 considers the nature and significance of international human rights, how, and how effectively, they have been protected, and debates about humanitarian intervention and its implications.
- Chapter 15 addresses the issue of international law, in particular examining the changing nature and significance of international law in the modern period.

- Chapter 16 considers the issues of global poverty and inequality, and also looks at development and the politics of international aid.
- Chapter 17 focuses on global environmental issues, and examines the challenge of climate change in depth.
- Chapter 18 discusses feminist approaches to global politics and how gender perspectives have changed thinking about war, security and other matters.

The following group of chapters considers attempts to address global or transnational issues through the construction of intergovernmental or supranational institutions.

- Chapter 19 examines the nature and growth of international organizations, and looks in particular at the role and effectiveness of the United Nations.
- Chapter 20 discusses the idea of global governance and examines its development in the economic sphere through the evolution of the Bretton Woods system.
- Chapter 21 focuses on the causes and significance of regionalism, focusing especially on the nature and significance of the European Union.

The final chapter, Chapter 22, provides a conclusion to the book by considering some of the possible futures of global politics, through a range of different lenses.

## **SUMMARY**

- Global politics is based on a comprehensive approach to world affairs that takes account not just of political developments at a global level, but also at and, crucially, across, all levels – global, regional, national, sub-national and so on. In that sense, ‘the global’ and ‘the international’ complement one another and should not be seen as rival or incompatible modes of understanding.
- ‘International’ politics has been transformed into ‘global’ politics through a variety of developments. New actors have emerged from the world stage alongside states and national governments. Levels of interconnectedness and interdependence in world politics have increased, albeit unevenly. And international anarchy has been modified by the emergence of a framework of regional and global governance.
- Globalization is the emergence of a complex web of interconnectedness that means that our lives are increasingly shaped by events that occur, and decisions that are made, at a great distance from us. Distinctions are commonly drawn between

economic globalization, cultural globalization and political globalization.

However, there are significant debates about whether globalization is actually happening and how far it has transformed world politics.

- The two traditional perspectives on global politics are realism and liberalism; these are both grounded in positivism and focus on the balance between conflict and cooperation in state relations, even though they offer quite different accounts of this balance. Critical perspectives, by contrast, tend to adopt a post-positivist approach to theory and contest the global status quo by aligning themselves with the interests of marginalized or oppressed groups.
- Global politics is an ever-shifting field, with, if anything, the pace of change accelerating over time. Debates have emerged about the changing nature of power and the shifting configuration of global power, about whether national security has been displaced by international, global or even human security, and about the extent to which justice now has to be considered in cosmopolitan or global terms.

### **Questions for discussion**

- How does 'global' politics differ from 'international' politics?
- In what ways is the international dimension of politics still important?
- To what extent have non-state actors come to rival states and national governments on the world stage?
- Does interdependence always lead to cooperation and peace, or can it generate conflict?
- Which definition of globalization is most persuasive, and why?
- Has the impact and significance of globalization been exaggerated?
- What are the key differences between traditional and critical approaches to global politics?
- Over what do realist and liberal theorists disagree?
- To what extent has global power become more diffuse and intangible in recent years?
- Why has there been growing interest in the notion of 'human' security?
- Does the idea of 'global' justice make sense?

### **Further reading**

- Brown, C. and K. Ainley, *Understanding International Relations* (2009). A highly readable and thought-provoking introduction to the theory and practice of international relations.
- Hay, C. (ed.), *New Directions in Political Science: Responding to the Challenges of an Interdependent World* (2010). A series of astute reflections on the nature, extent and implications of global interdependence.
- Held, D. and A. McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-globalization: Beyond the Great Divide* (2007). A comprehensive and authoritative survey of contemporary political and intellectual debates over globalization.
- Kamola, I., *Making the World Global: U.S. Universities and the Production of the Global Imaginary* (2019). A critical analysis of how the idea of ‘the global’ rose to such prominence in the social sciences.
- Ling, L.H.M., *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, worldlist International Relations* (2013). A path-breaking re-imagining of global politics from a non-Western perspective.
- Scholte, J. A., *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (2005). An excellent and accessibly written account of the nature of globalization and of its various implications.
- Links to relevant web resources can be found on the *Global Politics* website