

# Introduction

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Mega Lecture



The aim of this book is to provide an overview of world politics in a global era. We think that it is especially difficult to explain world politics in such an era because 'globalization', the word most often used to describe it, is a particularly controversial term. There is considerable dispute over what it means to talk of this era as one of 'globalization' and whether to do so implies that the main features of world politics are any different from those of the past. In this introduction we want to explain how we propose to deal with the concept of globalization in this book, and offer some arguments both for and against seeing it as an important new development in world politics.

Before turning to look at globalization, we want to do two things. We shall first say something about the various terms used to describe **global politics**, and then we shall spend some time looking at the main ways in which global politics has been explained. We need to do this because our aim in this introduction is definitely not to put forward one view of how to think about globalization somehow agreed by the editors, let alone by all the contributors to this volume. That would be impossible because there is no such agreement. Rather, we want to provide a context within which to read the chapters that follow. This means offering a variety of views on globalization and how to think about it. Our central point is that the main theoretical accounts of

world politics all see globalization differently. Some treat it as nothing more than a temporary phase in human history, so we do not need fundamentally to rethink how we understand world politics. Others see it as just the latest manifestation of the growth of **global capitalism** and its processes of modernization; yet others see it as representing a fundamental transformation of world politics, one that requires new ways of understanding. The different editors and contributors to this book hold no one agreed view; they represent all the views just mentioned. Thus, for example, they would each have a different take on the global events of 9/11, the global financial crisis that began in 2007, the failure to reach an agreement at the 2009 global climate change talks in Copenhagen, or the significance of the Arab Spring.

From what we have said so far you will gather that there are three main aims of this book:

- to offer an overview of world politics in an era that many describe as one of 'globalization';
- to summarize the main theoretical approaches available to explain contemporary world politics; and
- to provide the material necessary to answer the question of whether 'globalization' marks a fundamental transformation in world politics.

### From international politics to world politics

Leaving the term 'globalization' to one side, why does the main title of this book refer to 'world politics' rather than 'international politics' or 'international relations'? These are the traditional names used to describe the kinds of interactions and processes that are the concern of this book. Indeed, you could look at the table of contents of many other introductory books and find a similar listing of main topics dealt with, yet often these books would have either 'international relations' or 'international politics' as their main title. Furthermore, the discipline that studies these issues is nearly always called International Politics, International Relations, or International Studies. Our reason for choosing the phrase 'world politics' is that we think it is more inclusive than either of the alternative terms. It is meant to signal the fact that our interest is in the politics and political patterns in

the world and not only those between **nation-states** (as the terms international relations or international politics imply). Thus we are interested in relations between institutions and organizations that may or may not be states (for example, **multinational corporations**, terrorist groups, classes, or human rights **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs); these are sometimes known as **transnational actors**). Similarly, the term 'international relations' seems too exclusive. Of course, it often does represent a widening of concern from simply the political relations between nation-states, but it still restricts our focus to international relations, whereas we think that relations between, say, cities and other governments or **international organizations** can be equally important to what states and other political actors do. So we prefer to characterize the relations we are interested in



as those of world politics, with the important proviso that we do not want the reader to define politics too narrowly. You will see this issue arising time and time again in the chapters that follow, since many contributors want to define politics very widely. One obvious example concerns the relationship between politics and economics; there is clearly an overlap, and a lot of bargaining power goes to the person who can persuade others that the existing distribution of resources is 'simply'

an economic question rather than a political issue. We want you to think about politics very broadly for the time being, as several of the chapters will describe as 'political' features of the contemporary world that you may not have previously thought of as such. Our focus is on the patterns of political relations, defined broadly, that characterize the contemporary world. Many will be between states, but many—and perhaps most—will not.

### Theories of world politics

The basic problem facing anyone who tries to understand contemporary world politics is that there is so much material to look at that it is difficult to know which things matter and which do not. Where on earth would you start if you wanted to explain the most important political processes? How, for example, would you explain 9/11, or the 2003 war in Iraq, the recent global financial crisis, or the failure of the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen? Why did President Barack Obama escalate the war in Afghanistan in 2010? Why was the apparent economic boom in much of the capitalist world followed by a near devastating collapse of the global financial system? Why has Russia supported the Assad regime in the civil war in Syria since 2011? As you will know, there are very different answers to questions such as these, and there seems no easy way of arriving at a definitive answer to them.

Whether you are aware of it or not, whenever you are faced with such a problem you have to resort to theories. A theory is not simply some grand formal model with hypotheses and assumptions. Rather, a theory is a kind of simplifying device that allows you to decide which facts matter and which do not. A good analogy is using sunglasses with different-coloured lenses: put on the red pair and the world looks red; put on the yellow pair and it looks yellow. The world is not any different; it just looks different. So it is with theories. Shortly, we shall summarize the main theoretical views that have dominated the study of world politics so that you will get an idea of which 'colours' they paint world politics. But before we do so, please note that we do not think that theory is an option. It is not as if you can say that you do not want to bother with a theory; all you want to do is to look at the 'facts'. We believe that this is simply impossible, since the only way you can decide which of

the millions of possible facts to look at is by adhering to some simplifying device that tells you which ones matter the most. We think of theory as such a simplifying device. Note also that you may well not be aware of your theory. It may just be the view of the world that you have inherited from family, peer group, social class, or the media. It may just seem common sense to you and not at all anything complicated like a theory. But we fervently believe that all that is happening in such a case is that your theoretical assumptions are implicit rather than explicit. We prefer to try to be as explicit as possible when it comes to thinking about world politics.

People have tried to make sense of world politics for centuries, and especially so since the separate academic discipline of International Politics was formed in 1919 when the Department of International Politics was set up at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Interestingly, the individual who set up that department, a Welsh industrialist called David Davies, saw its purpose as being to help prevent war. By studying international politics scientifically, it was believed, scholars could find the causes of the world's main political problems and put forward solutions to help politicians solve them. For the next twenty years, the discipline was marked by such a commitment to change the world. This is known as a **normative** position, with the task of academic study being one of making the world a better place. Its opponents characterized it as **idealism**, in that it had a view of how the world ought to be and tried to assist events to turn out that way. Many opponents of this view preferred an approach they called **realism**, which, rather unsurprisingly, stressed seeing the world as it 'really is' rather than how we would like it to be. And the 'real' world as seen by realists is not a very pleasant place—human beings are at best selfish, and



probably much worse. On this view, notions such as the perfectibility of human beings and the possibility of an improvement of world politics seem far-fetched. This debate between idealism and realism has continued to the present day, but it is fair to say that realism has tended to have the upper hand. This is mainly because it appears to accord more with common sense than does idealism, especially when the media bombard us daily with images of how awful human beings can be to one another. Here we would like you to think about whether such a realist view is as neutral as it is commonsensical. After all, if we teach world politics to generations of students and tell them that people are selfish, then does this not become common sense? And when they go to work in the media, for government departments, or for the military, don't they simply repeat what they have been taught and act accordingly? Might realism simply be the ideology of powerful states, interested in protecting the status quo? For now, we would like to keep the issue open and simply point out that we are not convinced that realism is as objective or as non-normative as it is portrayed.

What is certainly true is that realism has been the dominant way of explaining world politics in the last hundred years. We shall now summarize the main assumptions underlying realism, and then do the same for its main rivals as theories of world politics: **liberalism**, **Marxism**, **social constructivism**, **poststructuralism**, and **postcolonialism**. These theories will be discussed in much more detail in Part Two of this book, along with a chapter on normative approaches that seek to explain contemporary world politics. Each of these theories will also be reflected in three of the other four parts that comprise the book. In Part One we shall look at the historical background to the contemporary world. In Part Three we shall look at the main structures and processes of contemporary world politics. In Part Four we shall deal with some of the main issues in the globalized world. So although we shall not go into much depth now about these theories, we need to give you a flavour of their main themes since we want, after summarizing them, to say something about how each might think about globalization.

### Realism and world politics

For realists, the main actors on the world stage are **states**, which are legally sovereign actors. **Sovereignty** means that there is no actor above the state that can compel it to act in specific ways. Other actors, such as

multinational corporations or international organizations, all have to work within the framework of interstate relations. As for what propels states to act as they do, realists see human nature as centrally important. For realists, human nature is fixed, and, crucially, it is selfish. To think otherwise is to make a mistake, and it was such a mistake that the realists accused the idealists of making. As a result, world politics (or, more accurately for realists, international politics) represents a struggle for **power** between states, each trying to maximize their **national interest**. Such order as exists in world politics is the result of the workings of a mechanism known as the **balance of power**, whereby states act so as to prevent any one state dominating. Thus world politics is all about bargaining and alliances, with **diplomacy** a key mechanism for balancing various national interests. But finally, the most important tool available for implementing states' foreign policies is military force. Ultimately, since there is no sovereign body above the states that make up the international political system, world politics is a **self-help** system in which states must rely on their own military resources to achieve their ends. Often these ends can be achieved through **cooperation**, but the potential for conflict is ever present.

In recent years, an important variant of realism, known as **neo-realism**, has developed. This view stresses the importance of the **structure** of the international political system in affecting the behaviour of all states. Thus, during the cold war two main powers dominated the **international system**, and this led to certain **rules** of behaviour; now that the cold war has ended, the structure of world politics is said to be moving towards **multipolarity** (after a phase of **unipolarity**), which for neo-realists will involve very different rules of the game.

### Liberalism and world politics

Liberals have a different view of world politics, and like realists, have a long tradition. Earlier we mentioned idealism, and this was really one rather extreme version of liberalism. There are many variants of liberalism, but the main themes that run through liberal thought are that human beings are perfectible, that democracy is necessary for that perfectibility to develop, and that ideas matter. Behind all this lies a belief in progress. Accordingly, liberals reject the realist notion that war is the natural condition of world politics. They also question the idea that the state is the main actor on the



world political stage, although they do not deny that it is important. They see multinational corporations, transnational actors such as terrorist groups, and international organizations as central actors in some issue-areas of world politics. In those issue-areas in which the state acts, they tend to think of the state not as a unitary or united actor but as a set of bureaucracies, each with its own interests. Therefore there can be no such thing as a national interest, since it merely represents the result of whatever bureaucratic organizations dominate the domestic decision-making process. In relations between states, liberals stress the possibilities for cooperation, and the key issue becomes devising international settings in which cooperation can be best achieved. The picture of world politics that results from the liberal view is of a complex system of bargaining between many different types of actor. Military force is still important but the liberal agenda is not as restricted as the realist one. Liberals see national interests in more than just military terms, and stress the importance of economic, environmental, and technological issues. Order in world politics emerges not from a balance of power but from the interactions between many layers of governing arrangements, comprising laws, agreed norms, international regimes, and institutional rules. Fundamentally, liberals do not think that sovereignty is as important in practice as realists think it is in theory. States may be legally sovereign, but in practice they have to negotiate with all sorts of other actors, with the result that their freedom to act as they might wish is seriously curtailed. **Interdependence** between states is a critically important feature of world politics.

### Marxist theories and world politics

The third main theoretical position we want to mention, Marxist theory, is also known as historical materialism, which immediately gives you clues as to its main assumptions. We want to point out that Marxist theory has been less influential historically than either realism or liberalism, and has less in common with either realism or liberalism than they do with each other. For Marxist theory, the most important feature of world politics is that it takes place in a world capitalist economy. In this world economy the most important actors are not states but classes, and the behaviour of all other actors is ultimately explicable by class forces. Thus states, multinational corporations, and even international organizations represent the dominant class interest in the world economic system. Marxist theorists

differ over how much leeway actors such as states have, but all agree that the world economy severely constrains the freedom of manoeuvre of states. Rather than world politics being an arena of conflict between national interests or an arena with many different issue-areas, Marxist theorists conceive world politics as the setting in which class conflicts are played out. As for order in world politics, Marxist theorists think of it primarily in economic rather than in military terms. The key feature of the international economy is the division of the world into core, semi-periphery, and periphery areas. In the semi-periphery and the periphery there exist cores that are tied into the capitalist world economy, while in even the core area there are peripheral economic areas. In all of this, what matters is the dominance of the power not of states but of global capitalism, and it is these forces that ultimately determine the main political patterns in world politics. Sovereignty is not nearly as important for Marxist theorists as for realists since it refers to political and legal matters, whereas the most important feature of world politics is the degree of economic autonomy, and here Marxist theorists see all states as having to play by the rules of the international capitalist economy.

### Social constructivism

Social constructivism is a relatively new theory about world politics, one that developed in the late 1980s and has been becoming increasingly influential since the mid-1990s. The approach arose out of a set of events in world politics, notably the disintegration of the Soviet empire, as symbolized most notably by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This indicated that human agency had a much greater potential role in world politics than implied by realism and liberalism. But the theoretical underpinnings of the approach are much older, and relate to a series of social-scientific and philosophical works that dispute the notion that the social world is external to the people who live in it, and is not easily changed. Realism and liberalism to different degrees stress the regularities and 'certainties' of political life (although liberalism is somewhat less adamant). By contrast, constructivism argues that we make and re-make the social world and so there is much more of a role for human agency than other theories allow. Moreover, constructivists note that those who see the world as fixed underestimate the possibilities for human progress and for the betterment of people's lives. In the words of one of the



most influential constructivist theorists, Alexander Wendt, even the self-help international system portrayed by realists is something that we make and remake: as he puts it, 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt 1992). Therefore the world that realists portray as 'natural' or 'given' is in fact far more open to change, and constructivists think that self-help is only one possible response to the anarchical structure of world politics. Even more subversively, they think that not only is the structure of world politics amenable to change, but so are the identities and interests that the other theories take as given. In other words, constructivists think that it is a fundamental mistake to think of world politics as something that we cannot change. The seemingly 'natural' structures, processes, identities, and interests of world politics could in fact be different from what they currently are, and implying otherwise is a political act.

### Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism has been a particularly influential theoretical development throughout the humanities and social sciences in the last thirty years. It reached international theory in the mid-1980s, but can only be said to have really arrived in the past fifteen years. Nonetheless, in recent years it is probably as popular a theoretical approach as any discussed in this book, and overlaps with a number of them. Part of the difficulty, however, is precisely defining poststructuralism, which is also sometimes referred to as postmodernism. This is in addition to the fact, of course, that there are substantial theoretical differences within its various strands. One useful definition is by Jean-François Lyotard: 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define post-modern as incredulity towards metanarratives' (1984: xxiv). 'Incredulity' simply means scepticism; 'metanarrative' means any theory that asserts it has clear foundations for making knowledge claims and involves a foundational epistemology. You do not need to worry too much about what this means right now. It's explained in more detail in **Chapter 11** on poststructuralism. Put simply, to have a foundational epistemology is to think that all truth claims (about some feature of the world) can be judged true or false (epistemology is the study of how we can claim to know something). Poststructuralism is essentially concerned with distrusting and exposing any account of human life that claims to have direct access to 'the

truth'. Thus realism, liberalism, and Marxism are all suspect from a poststructuralist perspective because they claim to have uncovered some fundamental truth about the world. Michel Foucault, an important influence on poststructuralists in international relations, was opposed to the notion that knowledge is immune from the workings of power. Instead, he argued that power in fact produces knowledge. All power requires knowledge and all knowledge relies on and reinforces existing power relations. Thus there is no such thing as 'truth' existing outside of power. Truth is not something external to social settings, but is instead part of them. Poststructuralist international theorists have used this insight to examine the 'truths' of international relations theory to see how the concepts that dominate the discipline are in fact highly contingent on specific power relations. Poststructuralism takes apart the very concepts and methods of our thinking, examining the conditions under which we are able to theorize about world politics in the first place.

### Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism has been an important approach in cultural studies, literary theory, and anthropology for some time now, and has a long and distinguished pedigree. However, postcolonial approaches have until quite recently largely been ignored in the field of international politics. This is now changing, not least because old disciplinary boundaries are breaking down. More and more scholars working with international politics are drawing on ideas from other disciplines, including postcolonial ideas, especially those that suggest the Eurocentric character of the field. It is noteworthy that all the major theories we have discussed so far—realism, liberalism, Marxism, social constructivism, and poststructuralism—emerged in Europe in response to specific European problems. Postcolonial scholars question whether such theories can really purport to explain world politics. It is more likely that they help to continue and justify the military and economic subordination of the global South by powerful Western interests. Postcolonialism has also become more popular since the attacks of 11 September, which encouraged people to try to understand how the histories of the West and the global South have always been intertwined. For example, the identities of the colonized and colonizers are constantly in flux and mutually constituted. Postcolonial



scholars argue that the dominant theories such as realism and liberalism are not neutral in terms of race, gender, and class, but have helped secure the domination of the Western world over the global South. Thus an important claim of postcolonialism is that global hierarchies of subordination and control, past and present, are made possible through the social construction of racial, gendered, and class differences. As other chapters in this volume suggest, International Relations has

been slightly more comfortable with issues of class and gender. But the issue of race has been almost entirely ignored. This is even though race and racism continue to shape the contemporary theory and practice of world politics in far-reaching ways. In 1903, W. E. B. DuBois famously argued that the problem of the twentieth century would be the problem of the 'colour-line'. How will transnational racism continue to shape global politics in the twenty-first century?

## Theories and globalization

The first three of these theoretical perspectives, realism, liberalism, and Marxism, have tended to be the main theories that have been used to understand world politics, with constructivism and poststructuralism becoming increasingly influential since the mid-1990s and postcolonialism gaining some influence in the 2000s. In the 1980s it became common to talk of an inter-paradigm debate between realism, liberalism, and Marxism; that is to say that the three theories (known as paradigms after the influential philosopher of natural science, Thomas Kuhn) were in competition and that the 'truth' about world politics lay in the debate between them. At first sight each seems to be better at explaining some aspects of world politics than the others, and an obvious temptation would be to try to combine them into some overall account. But this is not the easy option it may seem. This is because the theories are not so much different views of the same world, but are instead six views of different worlds. Let us explain this briefly.

While it is clear that each of the theories focuses on different aspects of world politics (realism on the power relations between states, liberalism on a much wider set of interactions between states and **non-state actors**, Marxist theory on the patterns of the world economy, constructivism on the ways in which we can develop different social structures and processes, poststructuralism on the power relationships behind all discourses about the world, and postcolonialism on the persistence of relations of hierarchy in world politics made possible by race, gender, and class subordination), each is saying more than this. Each view is claiming that it is picking out the most important features of world politics and that it offers a better account than do the rival

theories. Thus the six approaches are really in competition with one another; and while you can certainly choose between them, it is not so easy to add bits from one to the others. For example, if you are a Marxist, you think that state behaviour is ultimately determined by class forces, forces that the realist does not think affect state behaviour. Similarly, constructivism suggests that actors do not face a world that is fixed, and thus it is one that they can in principle change, in direct contrast to the core beliefs of realism. In other words, these theories are really versions of what world politics is like rather than partial pictures of it. They do not agree on what the 'it' is.

Perhaps none of these theories has all the answers when it comes to explaining world politics in a global era. In fact, each sees 'globalization' differently. We do not want to tell you which theory seems best, since the purpose of this book is to give you a variety of conceptual lenses through which you might want to look at globalization and/or question whether globalization really exists as anything more than a buzzword. All we shall do is say a few words about how each theory might respond to what is referred to as 'globalization'. We shall then go on to say something about the possible rise of globalization and offer some ideas on its strengths and weaknesses as a description of contemporary world politics.

- 1 For realists, globalization—however its advocates define it—does not alter the most significant feature of world politics, namely the territorial division of the world into nation-states. While the increased interconnectedness between economies and societies might make them more dependent



on one another, the same cannot be said about the states-system. Here, powerful states retain sovereignty, and globalization does not render obsolete the struggle for political power between those states. Nor does it undermine the importance of the threat of the use of force or the importance of the balance of power. Globalization may affect our social, economic, and cultural lives, but it does not transcend the international political system of states.

- 2 For liberals, the picture looks very different. They tend to see globalization as the end product of a long-running transformation of world politics. For them, globalization fundamentally undermines realist accounts of world politics since it shows that states are no longer such central actors as they once were. In their place are numerous actors of differing importance according to the issue-area concerned. Liberals are particularly interested in the revolution in technology and communications represented by globalization. This increased interconnectedness between societies, which is economically and technologically led, results in a very different pattern of world political relations from that which has gone before. States are no longer sealed units, if they ever were, and as a result the world looks more like a cobweb of relations than like the state model of realism or the class model of Marxist theory.
- 3 For Marxists, globalization is a bit of a sham. It is nothing particularly new, and is really only the latest stage in the development of international capitalism. It does not mark a qualitative shift in world politics, nor does it render all our existing theories and concepts redundant. Above all, it is a Western-led capitalist phenomenon that basically simply furthers the development of global capitalism. Rather than make the world more alike, it further deepens the existing divides between the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery.
- 4 For constructivist theorists, globalization tends to be presented as an external force acting on states, which leaders often argue is a reality that they cannot challenge. This, constructivists argue, is a very political act, since it underestimates the ability of leaders to challenge and shape globalization, and instead allows them to duck responsibility by blaming 'the way the world is'. Instead, constructivists think that we can mould globalization in a variety of

ways, notably because it offers us very real chances to create cross-national **social movements** aided by modern technological forms of communication such as the Internet.

- 5 For poststructuralists, 'globalization' does not exist out there in the world. It is a discourse. Poststructuralists are sceptical of the grand claims made by realists, liberals, and Marxists about the nature of globalization, and argue that any claims about the meaning of so-called 'globalization' make sense only in the context of a specific discourse that itself is a product of power. These various regimes of truth about globalization merely reflect the ways in which both power and truth develop together in a mutually sustaining relationship through history. The way to uncover the workings of power behind the discourse of 'globalization' is to undertake a detailed historical analysis of how the practices and statements about globalization are 'true' only within specific discourses.
- 6 Postcolonial scholarship on globalization is similar to much Marxist thought in that it highlights the important degree of continuity and persistence of colonial forms of power in the globalized world. For example, the level of economic and military control of Western interests in the global South is in many ways actually greater now than it was under direct control—a form of 'neo'-colonialism. So although the era of formal colonial imposition by force of arms is largely over, an important starting point for postcolonial scholarship is the issue of vast inequality on a global scale, the forms of globalizing power that make this systematic inequality possible, and the continued domination of subaltern peoples, those classes dominated under hegemony such as poor rural women in the global South.

By the end of the book we hope you will work out which of these theories (if any) best explains 'globalization'. We spend a lot of time in Part Two outlining these theories in more detail so as to give you much more of an idea of the main issues involved. The central point we want to make here is to reinforce our comment earlier that theories do not portray 'the' truth. In other words, the theories we have mentioned will see globalization differently because they have a prior view of what is most important in world politics.



## Globalization and its precursors

The focus of this book is how to think about 'globalization', and as we have already said, our concern is with offering you an overview of world politics in a global era. Globalization is mostly simply (or simplistically!) defined as a process of increasing interconnectedness between societies such that events in one part of the world increasingly have effects on peoples and societies far away. A globalized world is one in which political, economic, cultural, and social events become more and more interconnected, and also one in which they have more impact. In other words, societies are affected more and more extensively and more and more deeply by events of other societies. These events can conveniently be divided into three types: social, economic, and political. In each case, the world seems to be 'shrinking', and people are increasingly aware of this. The Internet is but the most graphic example of this since it allows you to sit at home and have instant communication with websites around the world. Electronic mail has also transformed communications in a way that the editors of this book would not have envisaged just a few years ago. But these are only the most obvious examples. Others would include: worldwide television communications, global newspapers, international social movements such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace, global franchises such as McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Mac, the global economy, and global risks such as pollution, climate change, and HIV/AIDS. There are, of course, many other examples, but you get the picture. It is these developments that seem to have changed the nature of world politics from what it was just a few years ago. The important point to stress is that it is not just that the world has changed but that the changes are qualitative and not merely quantitative; a strong case can be made that a 'new' world political system has emerged as a result

features of world politics discussed by writers before the contemporary period. We shall now note these briefly.

First, globalization has many features in common with the theory of modernization (see Modelski 1972 and Morse 1976). According to these writers, industrialization brings into existence a whole new set of contacts between societies, and changes the political, economic, and social processes that characterized the pre-modernized world. Crucially, industrialization altered the nature of the state, both widening its responsibilities and weakening its control over outcomes. The result is that the old power-politics model of international relations becomes outmoded. Force becomes less usable, states have to negotiate with other actors to achieve their goals, and the very identity of the state as an actor is called into question. In many respects it seems that modernization is part of the globalization process, differing only in that it applies more to the developed world and involves nothing like as extensive a set of transactions.

Second, there are clear similarities with the arguments of influential writers such as Walt Rostow (1960), who argued that economic growth followed a pattern in all economies as they went through industrialization. Their economies developed in the shadow of more 'developed' economies until they reached the stage where they were capable of self-sustained economic growth. What this has in common with globalization is that Rostow saw a clear pattern to economic development, one marked by stages that all economies would follow as they adopted capitalist policies. In a similar vein, much globalization theory has several points in common with the infamous argument of Francis Fukuyama (1992) that the power of the economic market is resulting in a new world order.



interdependence (Cooper 1968), the role of transnational actors (Keohane and Nye 1977), and the resulting cobweb model of world politics (Mansbach, Ferguson, and Lampert 1976). Much of this literature anticipates the main theoretical themes of globalization, although again it tends to be applied much more to the developed world than is the case with globalization.

Fourth, there are notable similarities between the picture of the world painted by globalization and that portrayed in Marshall McLuhan's (1964) influential work on the global village. According to McLuhan, advances in electronic communications resulted in a world where we could see in real time events that were occurring in distant parts of the world. For McLuhan, the main effects of this development were that time and space become compressed to such an extent that everything loses its traditional identity. As a result, the old groupings of political, economic, and social organization simply do not work any more. Without doubt, McLuhan's work significantly anticipates some of the main themes of globalization, although it should be noted that he was talking primarily about the communications revolution, whereas the globalization literature tends to be much more extensive.

Fifth, there are significant overlaps between some of the main themes of globalization and the work of writers such as John Burton (1972) and Hedley Bull (1977). Hedley Bull pointed to the development over the century

politics were those created by trade, communications, language, ideology, etc., along with the more traditional focus on the political relations between states.

Sixth, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there was the visionary work of those associated with the World Order Models Project (WOMP), an organization set up in 1968 to promote the development of alternatives to the inter-state system which would result in the elimination of war. What is most interesting about their many studies (see, for example, Mendlovitz 1975 and Falk 1975, 1995) is that they focused on the questions of global government that today are central to much work going on under the name of globalization. For WOMPers (as they were known), the unit of analysis is the individual, and the level of analysis is the global. Interestingly, by the mid-1990s WOMP had become much wider in its focus, concentrating on the world's most vulnerable people and the environment.

Finally, there are very marked similarities between some of the political aspects of globalization and long-standing ideas of liberal progress. These have most recently been expressed in the liberal peace theory of writers such as Bruce Russett (1993) and Michael Doyle (1983*a* and 1983*b*), although they go back centuries to writers such as Immanuel Kant. The main idea is that liberal democracies do not fight one another, and although of course there can be dispute as to what is a liberal democracy, adherents to this view claim quite



as you read the rest of this book. Because the arguments for globalization as an important new phase of world politics have been rehearsed earlier in this introduction—and also because they are most effectively summarized in Chapter 1—we shall spend a little more time on the criticisms. The main arguments in favour of globalization comprising a new era of world politics are:

- 1 The pace of economic transformation is so great that it has created a new world politics. States are no longer closed units and they cannot control their economies. The world economy is more interdependent than ever, with trade and finances ever expanding.
- 2 Communications have fundamentally revolutionized the way we deal with the rest of the world. We now live in a world where events in one location can be immediately observed on the other side of the world. Electronic communications alter our notions of the social groups we work with and live in.
- 3 There is now, more than ever before, a global culture, so that most urban areas resemble one another. Much of the urban world is now...

powerful critique of globalization theory, Hirst and Thompson (1996) argue that one effect of the globalization thesis is that it makes it appear as if national governments are powerless in the face of global trends. This ends up paralysing governmental attempts to subject global economic forces to control and regulation. Believing that most globalization theory lacks historical depth, they point out that it paints the current situation as more unusual than it is, and also as more firmly entrenched than it might in fact be. Current trends may well be reversible. Hirst and Thompson conclude that the more extreme versions of globalization are 'a myth', and they support this claim with five main conclusions from their study of the contemporary world economy (1996: 2–3). First, the present internationalized economy is not unique in history. In some respects they say it is less open than the international economy was between 1870 and 1914. Second, they find that 'genuinely' transnational companies are relatively rare; most are national companies trading inter-

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minority of the world's population can connect to the Internet is clearly an exaggeration when in reality most people on the planet have probably never made a telephone call in their lives. In other words, globalization applies only to the developed world. In the rest of the world, there is nothing like this degree of globalization. We are in danger of overestimating the extent and the depth of globalization.

- 3 A related objection is that globalization may well be simply the latest stage of Western imperialism. It is the old modernization theory in a new guise. The forces that are being globalized are conveniently those found in the Western world. What about non-Western values? Where do they fit into this emerging global world? The worry is that they do not fit in at all, and what is being celebrated in globalization is the triumph of a Western worldview, at the expense of the worldviews of other cultures.
- 4 Critics have also noted that there are very considerable losers as the world becomes more globalized. This is because globalization represents the success of liberal capitalism in an economically divided world. Perhaps one outcome is that globalization allows the more efficient exploitation of less well-off nations, and all in the name of openness. The technologies accompanying globalization are technologies that automatically benefit the richest economies in the world, and allow their interests to override local ones. Not only is globalization imperialist; it is also exploitative.
- 5 We also need to make the straightforward point that not all globalized forces are necessarily good ones. Globalization makes it easier for drug cartels and terrorists to operate, and the Internet's anarchy raises crucial questions of censorship and preventing access to certain kinds of material.
- 6 Turning to the so-called **global governance** aspects of globalization, the main worry here is about responsibility. To whom are the transnational social movements responsible and democratically accountable? If IBM or Shell becomes more and more powerful in the world, does this not raise the issue of how accountable it is to democratic control? David Held has made a strong case for the development of what he calls cosmopolitan democracy (1995), but this has clearly defined legal and democratic features. The worry is that most of the emerging powerful actors in a globalized world precisely are not accountable. This argument also applies to seemingly 'good' global actors such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace.

- 7 Finally, there seems to be a paradox at the heart of the globalization thesis. On the one hand, it is usually portrayed as the triumph of Western, market-led values. But how do we then explain the tremendous economic success that some national economies have had in the globalized world? Consider the so-called 'Tigers' of Asia—countries such as Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Korea, which have enjoyed some of the highest growth rates in the international economy but, according to some, subscribe to very different 'Asian' values. These nations emphatically reject certain 'Western' values, and yet they have had enormous economic success. The paradox, then, is whether these countries can continue to modernize so successfully without adopting Western values. If they can, then what does this do to one of the main themes of the globalization literature, namely the argument that globalization represents the spreading across the globe of a set of values? If these countries do continue to follow their own roads towards economic and social modernization, then we must anticipate future disputes between 'Western' and 'Asian' values over issues like human rights, **gender**, and religion.

We hope that these arguments for and against the dominant way of representing globalization will cause you to think deeply about the utility of the concept of globalization in explaining contemporary world politics. The chapters that follow do not take a common stance for or against globalization. We shall end by posing some questions that we would like you to keep in mind as you read the remaining chapters:

- Is globalization a new phenomenon in world politics?
- Which theory discussed above best explains globalization?
- Is globalization a positive or a negative development?
- Is globalization merely the latest stage of capitalist development?
- Does globalization make the state obsolete?
- Does globalization make the world more or less democratic?
- Is globalization merely Western imperialism in a new guise?
- Does globalization make war more or less likely?
- In what ways is war a globalizing force in itself?

We hope that this introduction and the chapters that follow help you to answer these questions, and that this



book as a whole provides you with a good overview of the politics of the contemporary world. Whether or not you conclude that globalization is a new phase in world politics, whether you think it is a positive or a negative development, or whether you conclude that it doesn't really exist at all, we leave you to decide. But we think it important to conclude this chapter by stressing that globalization—whether a new form of world politics, merely a new name for an age-old set of features, or something else—clearly is a very complex phenomenon that is contradictory and difficult to comprehend.

Not all people in the world share a view of globalization as a progressive force in world politics. It is not one thing. How we think about politics in the global era will reflect not merely the theories we accept, but our own positions in this globalized world. In this sense, how we respond to world events may itself be ultimately dependent on the social, cultural, economic, and political spaces we occupy. In other words, world politics suddenly becomes very personal: how does your economic position, your ethnicity, gender, culture, or your religion determine what globalization means to you?

### Further Reading



There are several good introductory guides to the globalization debate. A comprehensive discussion is found in **A. McGrew and D. Held** (2007), *Globalization Theory: Approaches and Controversies* (Cambridge: Polity Press). See also **D. Held and A. McGrew** (eds) (2003), *The Global Transformations Reader*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press). **J. A. Scholte** (2005), *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan) offers a good overview of aspects of globalization. Also see **C. el-Ojeili and P. Hayden** (2006), *Critical Theories of Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

**A. McGrew and P. Lewis** (1992), *Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press) is a good collection of essays about global politics and contains some very relevant chapters on the relationship between the three theories discussed above and globalization. **R. Robertson** (1992), *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage) is a very widely cited survey of the relations between globalization and global culture. **J. N. Rosenau and E.-D. Czempiel** (1992), *Governance without Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) is a good collection of essays dealing with the political aspects of globalization. **C. Enloe** (2007), *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield) is a good analysis from a leading feminist of the connections between globalization and various forms of violence. **K. Mahbubani** (2013), *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West and the Logic of One World* (New York: PublicAffairs) provides an interesting analysis of the argument that a power shift is needed to reflect new global political realities.

We would also point you to other books in the Rowman & Littlefield series on 'globalization' edited by **M. B. Steger and T. Carver**, in particular **S. Krishna** (2008), *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-first Century* and **V. M. Moghadam** (2008), *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Global Justice Movement*.

Excellent critiques of the globalization thesis are **J. Rosenberg** (2002), *The Follies of Globalization Theory* (London: Verso), **D. Held and A. McGrew** (2002), *Globalization/Anti-globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press), **B. Gills** (ed.) (2002), *Globalization and the Politics of Resistance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), **B. K. Gills and W. R. Thompson** (eds) (2006), *Globalization and Global History* (London: Routledge), **Joseph Stiglitz** (2003), *Globalization and Its Discontents* (London: Penguin) and (2006), *Making Globalization Work* (New York: W. W. Norton), **R. Falk** (1999), *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press), **L. Weiss** (1998), *The Myth of the Powerless State* (Cambridge: Polity Press), **P. Hirst and G. Thompson**