

Chapter 25

Nationalism

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Reader's Guide

In this chapter I question the conventional view that nationalism preceded globalization, ushering in a world order of nation-states that globalization now threatens. Instead, I argue that globalization preceded and has constantly shaped nationalism. I begin by looking at how nationalism has been defined and explained. I then outline how global politics has

shaped nationalism over a number of distinct phases since 1750. The key connection between the two is the nation-state, both as nationalist objective and as the main power container of the modern world. However, nationalism, the nation-state, and relations between nation-states change in each phase. This historical perspective can help us to understand current relationships between global politics and nationalism.

Introduction: concepts and debates

A standard view of the relationship between nationalism, nation-states, and global politics goes something like this. (1) There developed in Europe from about the mid-seventeenth century an order of sovereign, territorial states (the 'Westphalian system') (see Ch. 2). (2) The rise of nationalism from the late eighteenth century nationalized this state order, extending from Europe until the whole world was organized as a series of nation-states (see Box 25.1). International relations became relations between nation-states. (3) Globalization undermines this political order by eroding both sovereign territorial power and national identity. Before considering propositions (2) and (3), I outline key concepts and debates concerning nationalism and nation-states.

I define **nationalism** as the idea that membership of the nation provides the overriding focus of political identity and loyalty, which in turn demands **national self-determination**. Nationalists think of the nation in different ways, although they all take it to refer to a 'whole society' occupying a specific territory. However, the same society or territory can be claimed by competing nationalists. For example, Turkish nationalists claim Kurds in Turkey as Turkish, a view Kurdish nationalists reject (see Case Study 3). Defining nation is more difficult than defining nationalism. Some writers stress objective features such as language; some its

subjective, imagined character; while others are sceptical about using the term at all. Box 25.2 provides examples of these three views. By overriding, I mean that many people think the world is divided into nations, which are the main, if not sole, object of political loyalty. **Self-determination** usually means independent

Box 25.2 Definitions of nation

'[The nation] . . . is an imagined political community—imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign . . . It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion . . . The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations . . . It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.'

(Benedict Anderson 1991: 5–6)

'let us define it [the nation] at the outset as a large social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness. Many of these ties could be mutually substitutable—some playing a particularly important role in one nation-building process, and no more than a subsidiary part in others. But among them, three stand out as irreplaceable: (1) a "memory" of some common past, treated as a "destiny" of the group—or at least of its core constituents; (2) a density of linguistic or cultural ties enabling a higher degree of social communication within the group than beyond it; (3) a conception of the equality of all members of the group organized as a civil society.'

(Miroslav Hroch 1996: esp. 79)

'Neither objective nor subjective definitions are thus satisfactory, and both are misleading. In any case, agnosticism is the best initial posture of a student in this field, and so this book assumes no a priori definition of what constitutes a nation. As an initial working assumption any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a "nation", will be treated as such. However, whether such a body of people does so regard itself cannot be established simply by consulting writers or political spokesmen of organizations claiming the status of "nation" for it. The appearance of a group of spokesmen for some "national idea" is not insignificant, but the word "nation" is today used so widely and imprecisely that the use of the vocabulary of nationalism today may mean very little indeed.'

(Eric Hobsbawm 1990: 8–9)

Box 25.1 The development of a world of nation-states

Date	Rough number of nation(al) states*
1500	2 (England, France)
1800	6 (Britain, France, Holland, USA, Spain, Portugal)
1900	30 (including Belgium, Germany, Italy, Serbia, Romania, Greece, Brazil, Argentina, Japan, Canada)
1923	45 members of the League of Nations
1945	51 states established the United Nations
1950	60 members of UN
1960	99 members of UN
1970	127 members of UN
2006	192 members of UN
2012	193 members of UN

*Before 1923 this is an estimate based on historical judgement. Thereafter it is based on membership of the League of Nations and the United Nations.

statehood. However, nationalists might settle for something less, such as autonomy within a federal state.

Nationalism can be considered as ideology, as politics, as sentiments. Definitions of nationalism usually frame it as ideology, a political worldview. However, we might have ignored this ideology had it not become significant. This happened when nationalism shaped people's sense of identity: nationalism as sentiments. It also happened when nationalism was taken up by movements seeking to form nation-states: nationalism as politics.

It is helpful to divide each aspect of nationalism into types. Here are some examples. Ideology can be civic or ethnic. **Civic nationalism** is commitment to a state and its values. State membership determines nationality, as in the multi-ethnic immigrant society of the USA. **Ethnic nationalism** is commitment to a group of (imagined) common descent. Nation precedes state, as in ethno-national states formed in modern Europe. There are problems with this distinction. Every nationalism invokes culture and values, and these change, often quickly. Cultural factors like religion and language cannot easily be assigned to the ethnic or civic category. There is a danger of moralizing the distinction (civic good; ethnic bad). Nevertheless, the distinction can be useful.

Nationalist sentiments can be of the elite or of the masses. Some nationalist ideas appeal only to a small stratum of the population, whereas others have popular resonance. In terms of politics, nationalism can be state-strengthening or state-subverting. State-strengthening nationalism accepts an existing state as broadly legitimate but seeks to strengthen it, internally by 'purifying' the nation and reforming government, externally by reclaiming 'national' territory

and extending power. State-subverting nationalism aims to create a new state, usually by separation from a larger state, sometimes by unifying smaller states.

The relationship of nationalism to global politics varies with these types. Mass-nationalism, using ethnic ideas to subvert an existing state, is very different from elite-nationalism, using civic ideas to strengthen an existing state.

It is generally agreed that nationalism is modern. Explanations of its origins and growth revolve round four key questions: (1) Does nationalism depend on the prior existence of nations? (2) Are nations modern or do they extend far back in time? (3) Should we privilege culture, or economics, or politics in our explanations? (4) What is the role played by internal factors (such as a shared culture) in relation to external factors (such as threats or support from powerful states) in shaping nationalism? Table 25.1 summarizes positions in this debate.

Sometimes there is confusion over the usage of 'nation' and 'state'. The leading **international organization** is the United Nations. The term 'Nations' here actually means 'States'. Cultural diversity can be so great as to render implausible any claim that these are ethno-national states. In many states, the lack of democracy renders implausible any claim that these are civic-national states. What, then, does the term nation-state mean? I do not think it worth trying to identify how 'national' states are because the criteria are so fuzzy, and it means accepting basic nationalist assumptions. Instead, I shall treat as nation-states states that claim to be national (however nation is defined), are not confronted internally by powerful state-subverting nationalist movements, and are accepted by the international community.

Table 25.1 Debates on nationalism

Priority (nation or nationalism)	Dating (pre-modern/modern)	Type (ideology, politics, sentiment)	Key factor (culture, economy, politics)	Theory (short name)	Theorist (example)
Nation	Modern	Sentiment	Culture (belief as identity)	Primordialism	Walker Connor
Nation	Pre-modern (ethnie)	Sentiment	Culture (myths and memories)	Ethno-symbolism	Anthony Smith
Nation	Pre-modern	Sentiment	Culture (beliefs as creeds)	Perennialism	Adrian Hastings
Nationalism	Modern	Sentiment	Economy (industry)	Modernism	Ernest Gellner
Nationalism	Modern	Sentiment	Culture (communication)	Modernism	Benedict Anderson
Nationalism	Modern	Ideology	Culture (intellectuals)	Modernism	Elie Kedourie
Nationalism	Modern	Politics	Politics (elite and modern states)	Modernism	Paul Brass Charles Tilly Michael Mann

Nationalism, nation-states, and global politics in history

Some historians identify very early forms of 'globalization'. From 1500 new global connections emerge as the Americas were brought into contact with Eurasia and Africa. Some historians claim to trace nationalism and nation-states back at least that far. However, it is generally agreed that nationalism as politics and/or mass sentiment became significant only from around 1750. Around this time one can also identify the first significant global political conflicts between states using nationalist arguments.

The concern of this chapter is with the relationship between nationalism and political power, in particular the processes producing the nation-state as the dominant form of state power and nationalism as the dominant political ideology. Consequently, I define globalization as the patterns of political interaction shaped by relations between the most powerful states that take place frequently, significantly, and simultaneously in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. This is a pragmatic definition that omits non-state elements such as communications, transportation, economic and social interactions, although obviously these influence the patterns of state interactions.

Anglo-French rivalry, c. 1750–1815

Global power

France and Britain deployed land and sea forces against each other, either directly or through proxies, in Europe, India, and North America. Both states sought to control global trading in mass commodities (cotton, tobacco, sugar) that were superimposed upon older **networks** of luxury trade. Europeans explained and justified their power as due to greater civilizational achievements than the rest of the world, which was seen as consisting of primitive cultures and decaying civilizations.

Global conflict and nationalism

The dominant form of nationalism was state-strengthening, civic, and elite. In France and Britain, there were demands for the removal of privilege, and to make government accountable to the 'nation'. This 'civic nation' was based on the interests of an expanding middle class that was itself shaped by commercial globalization. The conflict between Britain and France

provided public opinion in each state with a clear enemy. The conflict hit France harder than Britain, and precipitated revolution. From that revolution came the declaration that state sovereignty was derived from the nation. Revolutionary France, when it embarked on war in Europe, appealed to other nations to rise up against their governments. Those governments deployed nationalist rhetoric in reply.

Nationalism, nation-state formation, and international relations

Nationalism became significant in British and French politics but remained largely an ideology elsewhere in Europe. Rebellion in the Americas freed territories from Spanish and British control, and elites used the language of civic national independence. The defeat of Napoleon left Britain the major world power.

Pax Britannica, c. 1815–1914

Global power

States in Europe and America were preoccupied with regional affairs. Elsewhere, Britain exerted global power. Apart from **diplomacy** to co-opt or divide opponents, Britain relied on naval supremacy and informal collaboration with local rulers. Instead of combining coercive and economic power in traditional empire-state form, Britain proclaimed their separation. It abolished tariffs, ceased monopolizing overseas trade and shipping, and tied major currencies to the price of gold. This was linked to industrialization, accompanied by transformations in communications (telegraph, later telephone and radio) and transportation (steam power, later electric and oil power). All this enabled huge increases in long-distance migration.

Britain attributed its success to Christianity, parliamentary institutions, and free trade. However, the coordinating nature of British power meant these could not be directly imposed, even if much violence was often used. In Europe, the Americas, and Asia, wars in the 1860s were won by modernizing and nationalizing states that then turned their attention outwards, challenging British **hegemony**. Close links between technology and power led to state intervention; the belief that power depended on control of overseas resources fuelled the rise of imperialist conflict.

Global conflict and nationalism

Nationalism initially imitated the civic forms projected by France and Britain—partly because success breeds imitation, partly because nationalists aimed at support from France and Britain. These nationalists projected themselves as ‘historic’ nations, insisting that ‘non-historic’ nationalities assimilate into ‘high-culture’ nations. This stimulated counter-nationalism, which stressed folk culture, popular religion, and spoken language. These had little initial success, but diffused nationalist ideas.

Beyond Europe there was little stimulus to nationalism, given the indirect nature of British power, which was not yet projected in nationalist forms. There were reactions against Christianity and secular modernity. Such values could be accepted (e.g. Christian conversion) or rejected. Most important were combinations, for example the ‘codification’ of Hinduism in India, which rejected Christianity but conferred ‘Christian’ features upon Hindu beliefs (see Case Study 2).

As the contradictions of British-led globalization grew, this generated new forms of nationalism. Imperialist conflict promoted popular state-strengthening nationalism in challenger states. These combined with race ideas, which often replaced civilizational and religious claims to superiority. Although mainly projected onto the non-European world, such ideas were also used within Europe, as in modern anti-Semitism. The tightening of direct control in empires, justified in race and nationalist terms, again stimulated counter-nationalisms.

Nationalism, nation-state formation, and international relations

The success of state-strengthening, elite, civic nationalism was linked to war using modern technology and organization. Nationalism became central in the new nation-states. Its liberal values were abandoned as elites confronted problems of state-building, economic development, and imperialist expansion. Ethnic, state-subverting nationalism had limited success against declining multinational states. Support from powerful states like Russia mattered more than the intrinsic strength of nationalist movements. Powerful nation-states challenged British hegemony. Britain responded in like fashion. The world increasingly divided into formal and controlled spheres of influence after 1880. International relations were dominated by arms races based on new technology and formal alliances.

Politicians appealed to public opinion and national interests. They then found themselves trapped by the nationalist sentiments they had helped create.

Implications for global politics

British hegemony was justified in cosmopolitan and free trade terms. Liberal nationalism developed in modernizing societies outside British zones of influence. Industrialized war enabled liberal nationalists to form new nation-states. These states established a new model. The state ruled with a bureaucratic apparatus, in conjunction with a dynamic industrial sector, over demarcated territory. Armed with nationalist ideas, it penetrated society in new ways: mass education and media, tariff protection, and subsidies. It projected its aggressive nationalism abroad in pursuit of empire. As political conflict globalized, it nationalized. Imperial powers aimed at new forms of control over other parts of the world. There was a contradiction between civilizational justifications and the reality of subordination and exploitation accompanied by race ideas. Counter-nationalism rejected imperial power, though it was often framed in broad regional terms (Pan-Africanism, Pan-Asianism, Pan-Arabism, etc.). Making rejection effective became possible when global political conflict turned into world war.

The era of world war, c. 1914–45

Global power

Initially Eurocentric, the First World War became global (see Ch. 3). In 1917 the USA entered the war. State control over population and economy increased massively. Although the inter-war period saw military dismantling and reduced state intervention, the Second World War was more global, state intervention more extensive, war more ‘total’. Radio communication and air power, large-scale economic assistance, and military coordination gave this war a transnational character. Military globalization was accompanied by economic de-globalization. Free trade and fixed exchange rates disappeared. Voluntary international migration decreased. Attempts to return to ‘normality’ in the 1920s were blown off course by the Great Depression. New technologies (radio, film and television, air travel, and automobiles) expanded massively. They were brought under state control, especially during the wars. Rather than undermining nationalism, these global processes became components of state-strengthening nationalism.

Global conflict and nationalism

In both wars the Western Allies proclaimed their cause as liberal democracy, not narrow nationalism, though liberal democracy was organized in the form of civic nation-states. However, their alliance with Russia compromised that claim, as did their failure to universalize liberal democracy after victory. Germany expressed clear-cut ethnic nationalism in 1914. Its Ottoman and Habsburg allies went to war to block state-subverting, ethno-nationalism. Victory for the Allies meant victory for the liberal democratic principle of 'national self-determination' embodied in Woodrow Wilson's **Fourteen Points**, but the beneficiaries were the ethno-nationalist opponents of the defeated dynastic empires. Each new state ruled in the name of the dominant nation and regarded minorities with suspicion. Nationalists representing minorities looked to their 'own' national state for support and invoked minority rights provisions in the peace treaties. Such national-

ism was inward-looking. The USA turned inward. But the defeated powers were denied membership, and the US Senate voted against joining. The League was led by France and Britain and seen as an instrument of their interests. The League did much in pioneering concepts of **international law** and administration, but failed in its ambitious objectives of creating a new peaceful **order**.

International relations became more violent and were expressed in terms of competing ideologies. In each state there were strong disputes, and politics was no longer monopolized by small elites. Communist and fascist ideologies justified extreme policies that assumed that sheer willpower could overcome 'reality'. Fascism and communism did not envisage a global order of nation-states but super-empires led by dominant races/nations or classes. Communist states eventually recognized limits, which helped them survive this era. The Third Reich pursued an escalating and ultimately self-destructive radicalism (see **Case Study 1**).

After a brief phase of stressing a world socialist mission, the USSR also turned inwards.

However, one distinct form of nationalism—fascism—was not insular. Fascists hated communism and **liberalism**, while rejecting old conservative elite politics. Fascists saw the nation as a supra-individual, classless collective requiring a strong state, mass mobilization, and a genius leader to assert itself in the world. The First World War gave nationalism a statist and militarist character on which fascists built. With economic depression and loss of faith in liberal democracy, fascism gained popularity. Fascist ideology was imperialist but profoundly anti-universalist. The fascist vision was of huge power blocs, each organized as a master nation/race ruling over inferior slave nations/races.

In the colonial world, military mobilization and attempts at economic development increased subordination and exploitation. World war made clear the divisions and fragilities of existing power structures. This promoted nationalist dreams of gaining independence, justified in liberal democratic or socialist terms.

Nationalism, nation-state formation, and international relations

Nationalism alone could not form nation-states. It succeeded only with the destruction or weakening of multinational states through war. The doctrine of national self-determination was applied after 1918 only to the defeated powers, and only in Europe. International relations were transformed with the League of Nations.

In the colonial world, the concern was to survive murderous conflict between the major powers. Nationalists sought to exploit these conflicts. Imperial states kept control unless defeated in war. World war created opportunities. Nationalism could be entrenched, strong, and popular (see **Case Study 2**).

Implications for global politics

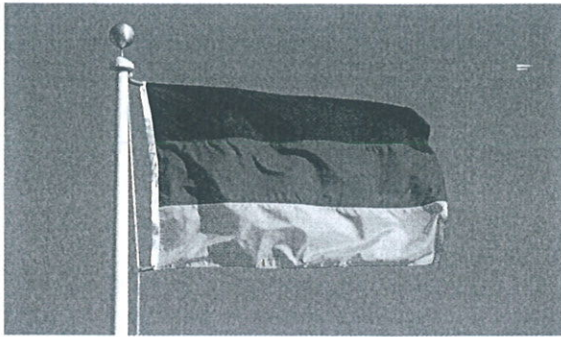
World war demanded global political strategies and undermined **state sovereignty**. It reversed globalization. Liberal democracy was redefined as defensive, confronted by communism and fascism. In 1941 the fascist world vision seemed close to realization. However, nationalists who initially thought that fascist powers offered ways of throwing out old imperial rule discovered that it simply meant replacing one master for a worse one. Such nationalism only succeed if old imperial power was dismantled and not replaced by new fascist power. How did it happen? In 1941–2 the USA moved out of isolationism into world war. Its leaders were not thinking about the war in global and integrated terms. Within two years, military victory looked like a strategy turned to plotting the shape of a new world. Nationalism and nation-states figure

The era of cold war, 1945–90

Global power

The major shapers of the post-war era were the USA and the USSR (see **Ch. 2**). Stalin regarded Soviet

Case Study 1 Interactions between nationalism and global politics in Germany



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enabled Prussia to gain dramatic and swift victories over Austria in 1866 and France in 1870-1.

Continued rapid industrialization in Germany and concern to challenge British hegemony stimulated a more populist, illiberal, and imperialist nationalism. When Germany began building a modern battleship fleet, this was seen as a direct threat by Britain. That stimulated popular nationalism in Britain and alliances with Russia and France, leading to world war. German defeat spawned extreme ethnic nationalism which, compounded by the Great Depression, brought Hitler to power. Nazism pursued race empire in Europe, and at least parity with what Hitler envisaged would be the other two remaining world powers, the British Empire and the USA.

It required a global coalition to defeat the Axis powers. The result was a global partnership of liberal and communist powers.

In 1750 the German lands were fragmented and its major powers—Austria and Prussia—weak in relation to Britain, France, and Russia.

The wars (1740-8, 1756-63) between Austria and Prussia were linked to Anglo-French conflict. These two states lost heavily in wars against Napoleon. Intellectuals propagated romantic and ethnic ideas of nationalism but recovery had more to do with a broad alliance against France, formed after the failure of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. After 1815 Britain was concerned that the major European powers balanced each other, leaving her free in the wider world. This included an Austria-Prussia balance in Germany. The major nationalist challenge took a liberal, constitutional form, influenced by Britain and France, but never developed a popular and unified appeal and was opposed by the main states. The key change came when liberal nationalism shifted to a state-strengthening position in support of Prussia. Early industrialization, especially in transportation (railways), communication (telegraph), and manufacturing (coal, iron, steel),

could war into a Western and a communist world. Liberal nationalism was rejected in the name of liberalism (even German!) New generations came to identify with the German nation. German nationalism to contradict the rejection of nationalism was part of the 'triumph of the West'. The nationalist demand for unity in advance of the collapse of communism took everyone by surprise. East Germans, unification offered a fast track to the Union and Western affluence and freedom. Liberal democratic commitment to unity with the East made it impossible to refuse or delay. One could see reunification as the first step towards the European Union eastwards and the end of nationalism.

...dividing with the state. Ethnic nationalism and socialism. (The self neutral and not identify with that state reunification appears. However, reunification there was no powerful of the event itself. The surprise. However, for back into the European West Germany's liberal less fortunate brethren unification. Indeed, towards the expansion much as a revival of

...themselves as valued r. Each had its own in the Middle East, where nationalism contributed to economic forms as mass media investment, low tariff energy produced between developed world consisted of an states as the decolonization late 1950s.

...lizing nation-states (see Ch. 26). Ethnic nationalism redundant easily acceptable. US doctrines of free

...as providing a defensive bulwark rather than a stepping-stone to global domination. Yet that expansion, plus Communist victory in China, made communism appear a global threat. Communist power was organized as conventional territorial rule, albeit with novel institutions and ideologies which extended into the non-communist world. The USA envisioned hegemony differently. Sole control of nuclear weapons initially made it possible to envisage power as coordinating rather than direct (except in occupied Japan and Germany). The foundations were laid of a liberal global order based on national sovereignty, with low tariffs, managed exchange rates, and extensive reconstruction. The first wave of decolonization in 1947-9 presaged the worldwide extension of this order.

However, the USSR soon acquired nuclear weapons and credible missile delivery systems. This intensified mutual perceptions of threat and made military capacity literally global. The USA retreated from its anti-imperialist stance. The nuclear umbrella handed initiatives

...to local states, which presented clients of one or other superpower sphere of power. Contested zones South East Asia, and Africa were could flourish. US hegemony and cultural globalization, in such and consumption. US aid, private offs, stable exchange rates, and high growth rates and integration regions of the 'free world'. This ever-increasing number of nation-ization process resumed from the

Global politics and nationalism
In Europe the focus was on stability within a supranational framework. Homogenization rendered ethno-dominant and made civic nationalism. This ideology could accommodate

Case Study 2 Interactions between nationalism and global politics in India



This broad anti-British sentiment culminated in the great uprising of 1857 and, after its repression, the imposition of formal imperial rule. This, along with the increased exploitation of India (including discriminatory tariffs) in rivalry with other imperial-

Mega Lecture

However, the bipolar order and sacrosanct principle of state sovereignty prevented state collapse turning into new states. The system preferred dysfunctional states.

Implications for global politics

The nation-state was reasserted and globalized, but in civic rather than ethnic form. States were legitimized by non-national values (democracy, communism), contained within blocs dominated by the USA or USSR, their sovereignty—even their ‘stateness’—often a fiction. Civic, state-supporting nationalism dominated. Both the USSR and USA recognized ethnic diversity, but contained within the framework of state sovereignty and civic national identity. State-subverting nationalism used civic language and demanded only devolution. Ethno-nationalism, secessionism, and irredentism would only re-emerge when the cold war ended.

I have gone quickly through a complex history, but it is the only way to grasp the relationship between nationalism and global politics. This is not a simple relationship. There is no linear direction to the history, such as the rise of nationalism followed by the challenge of globalization. There are patterns, and I have suggested some of these, but I leave it to you to decide if the historical record supports these suggestions. There is constantly changing interaction in which nationalism, nation-state, and global politics take on different and related forms. With each phase, the number of nation-states increases. The ideology of nationalism becomes the principal way of justifying the existence of particular states. It combines the democratic principle (nation=people), the claim to sovereignty (national self-determination), and a sense of distinct identity (nation as a unique society). It is also flexible enough to accommodate different social and political arrangements.

Nationalism is a chameleon-like idea that can adapt to changes in the global political order, matching its claims to the changing ways in which states interact. It mirrors, with its argument that the world is divided into distinct nations with particular territories, the formation of a world divided into sovereign states with sharply demarcated territories.

In this chapter I have not tried to write about ‘nationalism in general’: I do not think there is such a thing. If one accepts this view, it suggests that one should look at the contemporary relationship between global politics and nationalism as yet another set of different interactions. Our awareness of the history alerts us to what is new in these interactions.

Key Points

- There is no simple sequence leading either from nationalism to nation-state formation to changes in the global political order, or the other way round.
- There is no single, dominant form of nationalism, but rather it can be ethnic or civic, elite or popular, and strengthen or subvert existing states.
- The political ideology of the leading states matters most because others respond to their power and ideologies. In the first phase, Britain and France set the tone for nationalist developments elsewhere, but by 1900 German and Japanese models became more important, and after 1918, and especially after 1945, US and Soviet models mattered the most.
- State-subverting colonial nationalisms cannot on their own defeat imperial powers but are helped by the weakening of those powers in global conflict with each other.
- A combination of imitation and challenge, conflict between the major powers and nationalist assertion in the peripheries produced a world order of nation-states and turned nationalism into the dominant political idea.

Nationalism, nation-states, and global politics today

Forms of global politics

The collapse of the USSR led to a new wave of nation-state formations and changes in the balance of international power (see Chs 4 and 5). The end of the cold war permitted the emergence of state-subverting nationalism. The end of managed exchange rates and deregulation of financial markets undermined state power. The regional concentration of economic

development has permitted supra-state coordination in certain regions, notably Europe. While capital, goods, and information move freely and quickly across the world, the same does not apply to labour, especially unskilled people in poor countries. The digital information revolution opens up the prospects of global culture, whether envisaged as homogenized mass culture or a plurality of niche cultures, including

diaspora national ones. All this creates opportunities for new forms of nationalism.

Global politics and nationalism

The cold war labelling and preservation of a particular set of states as civic nation-states was undermined, enabling the rapid emergence of new state-subverting nationalisms.

First, there was ethno-nationalism in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. To counter this, the international community and the new Russian government rapidly conceded new state formations—thus turning state-subverting into state-strengthening nationalism. Furthermore, these new states were recognized as civic, territorial entities based on the federated republics of the former states. However, unlike earlier African and Asian decolonization, these republics were based on ethnic identities. That led to conflict over ethnic minorities within the new states. This has remained fairly low-key so far as Russian speakers in the new non-Russian states are concerned, but led to war and violent ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. The combination of intra-state conflict based on ethnic nationality with the lack of international support for state sovereignty or intervention could in some **failed states** lead to vicious ethno-nationalist violence. Rwanda was a case in point.

Second, there have been reactions against this resurgence of ethno-nationalism. One important change since the cold war is the increased resort to external intervention into state affairs, involving the United Nations, regional political-military organizations like NATO, individual states, and **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs). The justifications for these interventions are universalist—human rights, the promotion of democracy—rather than the protection of ethnic minorities. That, in turn, conditions the development of nationalism. Noting that the international community disapproves of ethno-nationalism, whether practised by the state against minorities or by minorities to subvert the state, nationalism presents itself instead as a movement for human rights, including cultural recognition, and asks for constitutional change such as devolution rather than independent statehood.

Nationalism, nation-state formation, and international relations

In the first unstable phase after 1990 there was a rapid emergence of ethno-nationalism and new nation-state

formations. However, after that phase, the international community, above all the USA, reacted against ethno-nationalism and state break-up, while at the same time enabling new forms of intervention into the internal affairs of weaker states. Nationalism has adapted accordingly and come to focus less on the classical demand for 'one state, one ethno-nation'. Instead, nationalism frequently combines sub-state and transnational connections, for example in the ways the European Union is seen to promote regional autonomy within and across individual states.

Nationalist politics is frequently represented as ethnic politics, but now demanding cultural recognition and affirmative action rather than political independence. Arguably, the nation-state is ceasing to be the central power-container of earlier phases of global politics. This can produce one kind of state-strengthening nationalism designed to resist the weakening of the nation-state. Here one can think of the rise of radical right nationalism, particularly concerned with the control of immigration and, in Europe, opposed to the European Union.

Yet the very erosion of nation-state power can also promote the shift of nationalism away from either state-strengthening or state-subversion to other forms. These might take up connections to transnational or global political actors other than states, such as diaspora organizations (see **Case Study 3**). Whether we should call such politics 'nationalism' is a matter for debate.

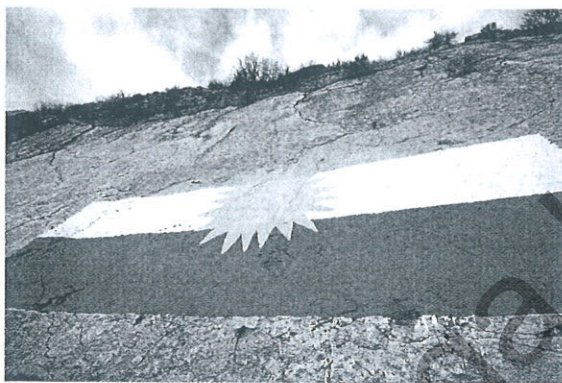
The impact on global politics

The rapid emergence of new kinds of nationalism, the formation of new nation-states, and the violent conflicts this has sometimes involved, have altered patterns of global politics. They have stimulated new interventions by a variety of state and **non-state actors**. These interventions have been justified in universalist terms: human rights, democracy (see **Ch. 31**). This is new: in the era of world wars the justification was (ethno-national) minority rights, and in the cold war period the principle of state sovereignty blocked intervention. All these interventions appear to undermine nation-states—culturally, politically, economically, and militarily. Obviously the impact is greatest for the weakest states. Above all, nationalism is not the same as nation-state. It is precisely when nation-states are most threatened that nationalism, as a reaction against that, can be strongest. At the same time, the very globalization of politics can stimulate new forms of sub-national and transnational politics, including forms of nationalism.

Key Points

- The sacrosanct principle of state sovereignty was weakened with the end of the cold war, new nation-state formation, and new economic and cultural forms of globalization.
- This provoked a first wave of state-subverting ethno-nationalisms, which could lead to violence and ethnic cleansing.
- However, international recognition for new states as civic, territorial entities, along with new forms of intervention and pressure, put pressure on nationalism to move away from this ethnic and state-subverting character.
- There is a state-strengthening nationalism that focuses on the threats globalization poses to the nation-state, and which can paradoxically get stronger the more the nation-state is weakened.
- However, perhaps more important is the shift of nationalism away from a state focus towards concerns with devolution, cultural recognition, and transnational linkages.

Case Study 3 Interactions between Kurdish nationalism and global politics



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Kurdish nationalism claims a long historical lineage based on place names, language, culture, and religion. However, variations in dialect, religious tendencies (Sunni and Alawi), state membership, and clan and tribal affiliations undermine credible claims about common Kurdish identity. What violent opposition there was to late Ottoman rule came from tribal groups, inducing Western observers to imagine a Kurdish national cause and thus helping some tribal leaders and urban intellectuals to construct a nationalist argument. However, the catalyst for nationalist politics came at the end of the First World War as the Ottoman empire collapsed and Woodrow Wilson preached national self-determination.

At the peace conference Kurdish nationalists claimed 'Kurdistan', supporting their case with maps. Hopes were raised by autonomy promises, but accompanied by suspicion as France and Britain carved up the Middle East. The formation of the Turkish nation-state and shattering of their autonomy hopes placed Kurdish nationalists in opposition to all the occupants of 'Kurdistan', that is Turkey, Iran, and the French and British mandates of Syria and Iraq.

Kurdish nationalism varied between these 'occupying' states as their conditions and the nature of politics varied. It was also

heavily factionalized. Nationalist action ranged from insurrection, through political efforts at negotiation, to cultural promotion, to quietism. After 1945 all four states negotiated with both their own and other Kurdish nationalists, producing bewildering and fast-changing political combinations. An Iraqi Kurdish nationalist faction once even allied with Saddam Hussein against a rival faction!

Yet maps of 'Greater Kurdistan' sustained the idea of Kurdish nationalism as more than a motley of rival factions, and were even referenced by the US State Department, giving credibility to Kurdish nationalist arguments. Repressive state policies also had the unintended effect of promoting Kurdish national sentiment.

Kurdish nationalism remains fragmented, shaped by global politics, interacting with the rivalries between four states and their changing internal conditions. For example, the new Iraqi state of 2003 includes an autonomous Kurdish region which—to the intense irritation of the government in Baghdad—negotiates oil supplies with Turkey, while Turkey represses its Kurdish nationalists, holding prisoner Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the main Kurdish party, the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party). Other Kurdish nationalists in Turkey counsel cooperation in pursuit not of autonomy but a multicultural Turkey, language which appeals to the EU, whose opinion, at least until the eurozone crisis, counted a great deal for a Turkish government seeking membership. Meanwhile, in Syria the Assad regime, struggling to control its major cities, cedes de facto autonomy to its Kurdish region.

A new element is diaspora nationalism. Many Kurds have emigrated to Europe (with large concentrations in Berlin, Stockholm, and Paris) and further afield. Diasporas—often wealthy, networking with host governments and civil society associations, free to organize, connected to their home states, using the latest communication technologies—wield great influence. They can take an 'all-Kurdish' view and are alert to what will persuade international opinion. Like all forms of nationalism, they change as global politics does.

Conclusion

Nationalism and global politics have mutually shaped each other from at least the mid-eighteenth century. One can discern major changes over different periods since then as the basic patterns of global power alter from Anglo-French domination to British hegemony to global imperialist conflict and world war, to the cold war and to US hegemony since 1990. There is no reason to believe there will not be further fundamental changes in the distribution of global power, and therefore in the development of new forms of nationalism. It may not be associated with any further increase in the number of nation-states, and it may severely challenge the idea that the world order is an order of sovereign nation-states, but that does not mean nationalism will diminish in significance.

The tendency to see nationalism as a passing phase is long established. The first secular creeds of modernity—liberalism and socialism—assumed that global ties would create a cosmopolitan world, whether based on free trade capitalism or classless communism. 'Narrow' nationalism had no place in such a globalized world. What these ideas failed to grasp was that the major power-container for managing the new global processes would be the territorial, sovereign state. This state used new technology to create superior military power, guided economic development, and increasingly shaped its population through mass schooling and control over the patterns of their interactions, and finally by providing many of the social services earlier associated with families and small communities. At the same time, the formation of a mobile, participatory society swept aside legitimations for state authority based on privilege, heredity, and religion.

Nationalism provided the new legitimation for such states. It complemented the development of the sovereign state ruling over the demarcated territory with the idea that the world was divided into diverse and distinct nations. It put the nation as source of authority in place of privilege and religion. It also proved capable of generating emotional solidarity that appealed to large-scale societies made up of diverse people who were strangers to each other. This was something that liberalism and socialism had not been able to achieve on their own.

Why nationalism has managed to achieve this is a matter of fierce debate. At one extreme, nationalism is seen as an expression of a pre-existing and strong sense

of solidarity (nations, ethnies, races). Only on such an existing solidarity, these writers argue, is it possible to create the modern bonds of nationalism. At the other extreme, nationalism is seen as something manipulated by modern political elites in order to secure power in the state. The second view can fit well with the view of international relations as relations between states that act fairly rationally on the basis of clear interests and calculations. The first view, by contrast, tends to see honour and emotions as playing an important part in international relations and making them unstable.

My own view is somewhat different. I have argued that nationalism is a political idea and practice that mirrors the emergence of the new order of sovereign, territorial states, and that alters its character as that order goes through different historical phases. Where there are shared values, nationalism will exploit these as expressions of national identity (e.g. making Hinduism 'Indian'), but this only works effectively in the context of modern state-formation and global political conflict. As nation-states espousing nationalist values—for whatever reason they have come into existence—have been generalized through the world, so nationalism becomes a generally accepted idea. The nationalist idea is derivative in the sense that there is a constant imitation of the basic claims about the existence of nations and their right to have their own states. However, nationalism takes distinctive customs, histories, values, and ways of life to justify these basic claims, so it always looks very different in one place compared to another. It is this that gives some plausibility to the self-perception of each nationalism that it is unique, and that it is its unique national qualities that account for its appeal and strength. Nevertheless, one nationalism, on closer inspection, looks very like another. Nationalism mirrors as much as it shapes the global movement towards a world order of nation-states.

In the most recent phase of globalization, this world order has arguably been called into question. But whatever we might think will happen to the nation-state, that is an issue distinct from nationalism. State-strengthening nationalism might well mobilize around the defence of a threatened nation-state. State-subverting nationalism might well exploit the new preparedness of the USA and international bodies to intervene in the affairs of states to demand support for claims to separate statehood. But beyond

this, nationalism may well also take on new forms in which the sovereign nation-state is no longer central, but rather what matters are demands such as devolution or cultural recognition, which actually weaken the concept of state sovereignty. Having established itself as such a powerful idea, sentiment, and politics, nationalism is likely to adapt to new global political

patterns just as it has done constantly over more than two centuries. Where it may once have matched the formation of a global political order founded on the sovereign nation-state, it may well adapt to a new political order in which the sovereign nation-state is less central. Certainly it is too early to write the obituary of nationalism.

Questions



- 1 Which came first: nations or nationalism?
- 2 Is nationalism the major reason for the formation of nation-states?
- 3 Why has nationalism spread across the world in the last two centuries?
- 4 Is it useful to distinguish between civic and ethnic forms of nationalism?
- 5 How and why did nationalism develop into imperialism?
- 6 Why did colonial peoples take up the idea of nationalism?
- 7 How can changes in global politics account for changes in nationalism?
- 8 How has the rise of the modern state shaped the development of nationalism?
- 9 'Nationalism is more important for strengthening than subverting the state.' Discuss.
- 10 'Contemporary globalization erodes nation-state sovereignty but does not undermine nationalism.' Discuss.

Further Reading



Debates on nationalism

Özkirimli, U. (2010), *Theories of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan). A good introduction to the different views and debates about nationalism.

Broad historical studies of nationalism

Breuilly, J. (1993), *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd edn (Manchester and Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press). Compares various cases, starting in Europe around 1500 and including material from twentieth-century Asia and Africa.

Breuilly, J. (ed.) (2013), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Thirty-six historians contribute chapters on thematic aspects of nationalism as well as regional case studies from across the world.

Hobsbawm, E. (1990), *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Focuses on Europe in the nineteenth century and the world more broadly after 1918.

Broad historical studies of globalization and modern global history

Bayly, C. (2004), *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell). Places the formative phase of nationalism in a world-historical framework.

Darwin, J. (2007), *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire* (London: Penguin Allen Lane). Shows how empires have shaped modern nationalism and nation-states.

Osterhammel, J., and Peterssen, N. P. (2005), *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press). A short and clear overview.