

Summary Article: **Nation-state**

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The framework of the modern nation-state seems to be nowadays the most natural political arrangement one can think of, and it is difficult to imagine an alternative political arrangement. Nevertheless, the state is a relatively new entity in the history of mankind, as it appeared only some 350 years ago. In our times, global processes related to globalization erode the state's position as the main definer of human geographical space. Movements of capital, people, technology, information, ideas – along with the growing power and influence of multinational corporations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – all pose a continuous challenge to the framework of the state and to the organization of a world system composed of sovereign states.

The conditions which enabled the creation of the state matured during the middle ages. In those days, there existed territorial frameworks, which were dominated by kings (France, England) who claimed a certain kind of sovereignty. Yet it was only alleged sovereignty, since behind this appearance stood weak political entities that possessed only vague political and judicial status. These frameworks were divided, internally, into separate centers of power, and the nobility (e.g., dukes, counts, etc.) were in fact local rulers of almost independent areas. Indeed, the king was at the top of the hierarchy and benefited from his status as “gods’ emissary to earth”; yet in practice he was “the first among equals.” All these territorial units were perceived as districts of the ideal Christian empire (*res publica christiana*), big and united, headed by two: the emperor as the political ruler and the pope as the spiritual leader.

In the latter part of the Middle Ages and with greater vigor during the Renaissance (between the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century), this situation changed. Dynastic struggles over power, the cultural revolution of the Renaissance, the growing importance of cities, and the crumbling of the feudal order – all led to a radical change in the political constellation. Over the ruins of the big, ideal Christian empire, different territorial unities – such as France, Spain, and England – gradually began to flourish. These units were based on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural resemblance. In each of these kingdoms, a centralized monarchist government (“royal absolutism”) was established, and the king had become a centralist and authoritative governor, who relied upon branched bureaucratic apparatuses. The concept of the “homeland” (*patria*) was now filled with new essence: the Middle-Age reference to “*patria*” as the place of birth was turned into “the kingdom.” The latter became an entity with cultural, political, and national unifying characteristics.

It is common to identify the Westphalia Treaty with the turning point which marked the creation of the modern state. In 1648, peace contracts were signed that ended the “Thirty Years War” (1618–1648) in the Holy Roman Empire, and the “Eighty Years War” (1568–1648) between Spain and the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. Representatives from Spain, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Denmark participated in the negotiations, and it evolved into a European peace conference, in which relationships between the religions, and territorial sovereignty issues between the countries, were resolved. The peace agreements also marked the completion of the process of granting territorial sovereignty to the leaders of the German countries. Nonetheless, these entities were not yet modern national states in the full sense of the term. Two conditions which are necessary for a modern state –

perfect congruence (or at least an ambition for such) between the nation and its political framework, and a political perception based on a common will – only emerged out of the French Revolution.

The modern nation-state and nationality were created in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The French Revolution and the War of Independence of the United States of America initiated the establishment of the early modern democracies, which were the first implementation of the perception which identifies the state as a framework which represents a nation.

A little later, two complementary developments in political thought accelerated the development of the concept of a nation-state. On the one hand was the growth of the liberal thinking (e.g., Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau), which emphasized political organization under the state's framework, where the individual or the society is the sovereign instead of god or the earthly representative – the king. On the other hand was the appearance of romanticist approaches (e.g., Fichte and Herder), which sanctify the romantic nationality and the concept of “the people” (*Volk*), alongside the emphasis of race and ethnicity.

The Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the social changes it initiated, as well as trends of secularism and the declining status of the church, intensified the need for new sources of identification. It was the nationality which provided feelings of belonging, identification, security, and solidarity in a world in which its values were radically changing.

The nineteenth century witnessed, therefore, the spread of nationality in Europe, and, following, the development of nation-states. The new states were unified political entities with a common national denominator and a national sentiment which preceded the political framework; and they were usually established after a national struggle. The “Spring of Nations” in 1848 – and the unity of Italy (1861) and Germany (1871) which followed – expedited the turning of the nation-state into the main political framework which organized international relations as well as the relations between collective organization and central governance. Yet, alongside nation-states, multi-ethnic empires continued to exist: the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian, and the British empires. The disintegration of the European and the Ottoman empires, and the establishment of the League of Nations (1919) and later on the United Nations (1946) – which recognized the right of nations for self-determination – gave further momentum to nation-states. Many states which were under the colonialist occupation started to demand political emancipation, and it was not long before many countries in Asia and in Africa eventually gained independence.

With the dissolution of the Eastern bloc at the end of the twentieth century, it seemed that the golden age of nationality had come to an end, and that democracy had won. Some even announced that history had come to its end. Nationality and nation-states have started to be challenged by wider notions of universalism of the human race on the one hand, and by narrower ideas of ethnic and religion particularism on the other hand. This post-national constellation was manifest, for example, in the heyday of the European Union at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Yet the rumors of the demise of the nation-state and nationality have been greatly exaggerated. The end of the millennium and the beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the blossoming of new trends of nationality. In regions which were formally under Soviet oppression – East and Central Europe, the Baltic region, and the Caucasus – nationality started to arise. These trends did not bypass Western Europe, where the Basques in Spain, the Scottish and the Irish in Britain, the Corsicans and the

Bretons in France, and the Austrians in South Tyrol demanded national rights, as well. At the same time, in other regions of the world, various national groups (e.g., Tamils, Kurds, and Palestinians) continued their struggle for independence, seeking to express their nationality under a nation-state framework.

Most generally, one of the elementary principles which define the state's sovereignty is its monopoly on the use of force and violence within a given territory. Yet additional characteristics, unique to nation-states, differentiate it from previous political forms, and constitute the nation-state's prototype. First, and maybe most important, nation-states see the state's framework as a tool to gain and preserve national unity, in all the dimensions which constitute public life. Moreover, between the state and the nation must exist (or is desired to exist) full congruence. Even in cases where a country consists of more than one nation, it will strive to gain congruence between the dominant national group and the political framework. Second, nation-states refer almost sacredly to their territory, and create a bond between the territory and the political frame. Third, nation-states possess a unique and centralized mechanism of public administration. Even if in some constellations a regional public administration exists, it will be subordinate to the central national government. Fourth, national culture exists in nation-states, and in cases of multiple nationalities, a dominant national culture exists. This national culture is created by the state's agents (such as those in the education system), and it is expressed by language, and other cultural forms, shared by the nation's people.

One of the most basic controversial questions is: what came first – the nation or the state? One approach claims that the nation preceded the state, and that the latter is a tool for the nation to gain sovereignty over a given territory. Others claim that nationality is a product of government policy, which is aimed at creating unity in a preexisting political framework.

In the context of this debate, three types of nationalities can be identified: the first is "ethnic nationality" (e.g., Israel), which is based on a common origin (ethnic and/or racial), shared unique history, a connection to a specific territory, a shared religion and symbols, and a collective memory. The second is "political nationality" (e.g., the United States), which is created by a collective which is unified around agreed-upon political principle, such as freedom, rights, equality, sovereignty, self-definition, representative authority, and so on. The third is "civilian-territorial nationality," which assumes that every person who lives within the state's territory can, if he or she chooses, be a part of the nation (e.g., France). Whereas the first type sees nationality as something which one is born into, the second and third types are based on the acceptance of a set of common values, or a continuous presence in a territory; that is, matters of free will.

Either way, one of the key concepts regarding the unifying element of a nation-state is what Anderson (1983) called "imagined communities": a nation exists first and foremost as an idea in people's minds. Four properties characterize the imagined community: first, it is imagined because it is related to a large group of people where individuals cannot know each other. Hence the need of an individual to "imagine" a connection to others in order to create shared foundations. Second, it is imagined because each nation, as big as it may be, needs a definition which distinguishes it from other neighboring nations. Third, the state imagines itself as sovereign, meaning "free." Fourth, the society is imagined as an entity in which its unity is deep, multidimensional, and wide.

Trends which are related to globalization generate a vast debate regarding the present and future of the nation-state. We can outline three major approaches to this issue: the first approach claims that global trends, including the intensification of global connections, erode the so-called sovereignty of the

state. Some even predict that these trends will eventually cause the extinction of the sovereign nation-state. Not everybody believes that this is a problematic development: some welcome it, since they claim that the traditional nation-state tends, by definition, to emphasize domestic special interests, thus preventing global human development.

The second approach claims that globalization does not necessarily erode the state's sovereignty. The power of global trends is not as strong as it seems to be, and it will not essentially harm the nation-state. Furthermore, the state can, should it decide to, forego or even disengage global restrictions, when they are perceived to limit the state's autonomy. Others believe that global trends not only do not harm the state, but in some cases might even fortify it. In any case, this approach believes that the nation-state has remained the most powerful global player, and that it can control global influences. States, especially large ones, have remained the central forces which discipline global forces.

The third approach claims that, though globalization does not pose a threat to the existence of the nation-state, global trends create changes in the state's functions and structures. Sovereignty today has different meanings and dynamics than in the past, and the static Westphalian system is experiencing basic structural changes, which modify it to deal with global challenges. In the unique conditions created by globalization, the state apparatuses are required to change in order to be able to govern. Authority becomes "multilayered" and sprawls "over" and "under" the state. The fact that private players in civil society play roles traditionally within the purview of the state forces the latter to acknowledge that even in the field of government it is not a sole player anymore, sometimes not even an essential one.

Global trends put stress on the nation-states "from above," in three main ways: first, the state is challenged in its ability and willingness to maintain sole sovereignty over the distribution of power within its borders. Global corporations, international organizations, individuals, and groups: all become more and more central players, in both the international and local arenas, while eroding the power of the state. Second, the idea of the welfare state is challenged due to the erosion of the state's obligation to the welfare of its citizens, and the abandonment of the social and economic sphere to the vicissitudes of market forces. In this respect, several key factors can be identified (which still are effective, even in the aftermath of the latest global economic crisis): the unification of national markets into one global market, the flow of capital to places where the workforce is cheap, technology replacing manual labor, and the radical emergence of a neoliberal ideology which promotes the minimization of government involvement in social and economic affairs. These trends mark the transition of the nation-state from an organized capitalist state to a non-organized capitalist state, or from a welfare state to a competition state. The long-term effects of the recent global crisis on these aspects of the state remain to be seen.

These processes, which are shaped by global trends, create local counter-reactions. As opposed to challenges "from above," challenges "from below" arise as well: isolationism, communitarianism, nationalism, fundamentalism, and so on. The state framework which is perceived as disappointing and inadequate, and the capitalist culture which is perceived as nihilistic and shallow, are supplanted by smaller frameworks which enable the preservation of social responsibilities and of traditional culture and values. This state of affairs was named by Barber (1995) and others as the choice between McWorld and jihad, with the first signifying the industrialized West, modern technology, consumer culture, and global universalism, and the latter signifying fundamentalism, sectarianism, and locality.

The new nation-state of the twenty-first century is therefore glocal: a constellation in which the state is challenged by forces “from above” and forces “from below,” and thus eroded in organizational, identity, and cultural perspectives. It is being challenged by forces which seek to merge it with its much larger exterior environment, and it is being challenged by communal identification patterns, which seek to dismantle it into smaller units. Global trends purportedly subvert existing local trends, but they also inflame and intensify them. Thus, the global and the local become mutually linked: the first draws its legitimacy from the “new” and the latter draws its legitimacy from the “old.” This is the basis of our human condition: on the one hand, an unprecedented unification, and, on the other, unprecedented disintegration.

SEE ALSO: End of History: The Views of Francis Fukuyama; European Union; Globalization from below; Glocalization; Imagined Communities; International Non-Governmental Organizations; Nation; National Identity; Nationalism; Political Globalization; Postcolonialism; Sovereignty; United Nations; Welfare State; Westphalia, Treaty of.

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