

	<p>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems Issue 2, Vol. 9, 2026</p> <p>RESEARCH ARTICLE </p> <p>Contemporary International Relations in the Era of Globalization: Structural Transformations, Sovereignty Challenges, and the Reconfiguration of Global Political and Economic Governance</p>
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Keywords	<p>Globalization; International Relations; Nation-State; Sovereignty; Global Governance; Diplomacy; World Politics; International Economy</p>
Abstract <p>This study examines the structural transformation of contemporary international relations under the accelerating dynamics of globalization, focusing on the reconfiguration of political authority, economic governance, and the role of the nation-state within an increasingly interconnected global system. Globalization is approached not merely as an economic process, but as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing political, technological, cultural, and institutional transformations that fundamentally reshape international interactions. The research employs a comprehensive methodological framework grounded in systems analysis, historical and comparative political approaches, and empirical evaluation of global political and economic trends. Particular emphasis is placed on the systemic interdependence among states, international organizations, transnational corporations, and non-governmental actors, highlighting how traditional state-centric models of international relations are increasingly complemented—and in some cases challenged—by network-based and multi-actor governance structures. The scientific novelty of the study lies in its integrated analysis of how globalization affects state sovereignty, diplomatic practices, and institutional legitimacy in the context of rapid advancements in information and communication technologies. The paper further explores the expanding influence of international economic organizations, global markets, and cultural exchanges, assessing their implications for national autonomy and global political stability. Rather than signaling the decline of the nation-state, globalization is conceptualized as a transformative force that redefines state functions, redistributes authority across multiple levels of governance, and reshapes the normative foundations of international relations. By situating globalization within broader theoretical debates in international relations and political sociology, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary world politics and offers a critical framework for interpreting ongoing global transformations.</p>	
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Introduction

In today's globalized world, there are nearly 200 sovereign states striving to sustain their existence and enhance their economic, industrial, and technological capacities while preserving their cultural identities. Simultaneously, these states aim to complete democratic transformation processes and improve social welfare levels. Among the key factors influencing national development are human capital, natural resources, geographical and historical positioning, and technological and economic power.

When globalization is conceptualized as a process of increasing interdependence and coordination, it becomes evident that it possesses both positive and negative dimensions. On the positive side, globalization has contributed to economic growth, the expansion of human rights discourse, and the promotion of international peace. Conversely, it has intensified economic crime, exacerbated environmental degradation, and widened the gap between developed and developing countries.

Many scholars perceive globalization as a transformation of the traditional state-centric international system and its normative foundations. Over the past several centuries—particularly in the last fifteen years—the international system has undergone profound and accelerated changes. These transformations are frequently interpreted through the analytical lens of globalization, which serves as a framework for explaining economic, political, social, and cultural shifts. One of the most notable characteristics of globalization is its conceptual ambiguity, as it lacks a universally accepted and precise definition (Held et al., 1999).

Economic Dimensions of Globalization

Globalization manifests itself as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural processes. Its political dimension is particularly evident in the institutional transformations of governance structures and the increasing influence exerted on state administrations. In this context, the traditional significance and operational effectiveness of diplomacy as a mechanism regulating relations among nation-states have gradually diminished.

International relations have expanded beyond state-to-state interactions to include relations between states and transnational corporations, as well as between states and international organizations. This expansion has undermined the monopoly of traditional diplomatic institutions and introduced new actors into the global political arena.

The economic dimension of globalization remains the most extensively debated aspect. In contemporary economic, political, and social systems, economic nationalism appears increasingly unsustainable. Even states that historically adopted socialist economic models have demonstrated persistent interest in attracting foreign capital, often at the cost of systemic transformation. As a result, a global economic system largely governed by transnational corporations has emerged, operating across national boundaries with remarkable efficiency.

Foreign direct investment has become deeply integrated with domestic capital, facilitating the integration of local entrepreneurs into the global economy. International economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have played a role comparable to that of transnational corporations in shaping the global economic order. By facilitating trade liberalization and the circulation of production factors, these institutions have actively contributed to regulating the global economy (Stiglitz, 2002).

Technological advancement—particularly in communication technologies—has also transformed the social and cultural structures of societies. While it remains uncertain which cultures ultimately benefit from these interactions, Western culture has demonstrated a relative advantage due to its effective utilization of global communication networks (Tomlinson, 1999).

Globalization, Space, and Sovereignty

At its core, globalization is a process deeply associated with the transformation of space and time. Scholars frequently emphasize the compression of time and space, the acceleration of interactions, and the intensification of global connectivity. Since the sixteenth century—especially with the expansion of maritime trade—capital, goods, and services have increasingly circulated across the globe, leading to the undeniable expansion of international trade (Asadov, K, 2025).

Globalization has also given rise to new governance mechanisms beyond the state and new forms of collective identity beyond the nation. Within this framework, globalization has become both an explanatory concept and a phenomenon requiring explanation. The symbolic erosion of borders, challenges to national sovereignty, the replacement of traditional national threats with transnational risks, and the reliance on network-based governance models characterize the contemporary global order (Ahmadov, 2026).

Economic transformation, advancements in information technologies, the proliferation of global risks, and the growing influence of regional organizations and transnational corporations further reinforce the theoretical claims of globalization. Rather than representing a linear or uniform process, globalization should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing economic, political, technological, legal, military, cultural, and ecological dimensions of human interaction (Scholte, 2005).

Political Relations and the Nation-State

The state remains a central subject of political science, both as a political actor and as the primary arena in which political power and struggle are exercised. Throughout history, numerous political theorists have regarded the state as an indispensable organizational form for human societies. Max Weber famously defined the state as an entity that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory (Weber, 1978).

Despite its long historical evolution and diverse theoretical interpretations regarding its origins, the modern state has occupied a dominant position in political life due to its institutional strength and authority. The contemporary interstate system is generally traced back to the Peace of Westphalia, which established principles such as territorial sovereignty and legal equality among states.

Core characteristics of the modern state include defined territorial boundaries, sovereignty, constitutional governance, impersonal authority, bureaucratic administration, legitimacy, and citizenship. As the ultimate decision-making authority, the state is responsible for establishing order and representing the collective will. However, globalization has generated complex debates regarding the future role and capacity of the nation-state.

As a fundamental actor in the international system, the state—particularly the nation-state—has been subjected to multifaceted reassessment. While globalization challenges traditional notions of sovereignty, it does not eliminate the state; rather, it transforms its functions and redefines its position within an increasingly interconnected global system (Giddens, 2000).

Capitalism, Globalization, and the Transformation of the Nation-State

Capitalism, which played a decisive role in the emergence of the concept of the “nation-state” and in establishing the state as the primary actor of the international system, has over time created the structural and functional conditions for questioning the nation-state and eroding its sovereignty. Capitalism has influenced the nation-state both directly and indirectly, sometimes reinforcing state power and at other times undermining it. The globalization process has transformed the relationship between capitalism and the nation-state into a fundamentally different configuration from that of the past, placing the economic, political, social, and cultural activities of the nation-state under increasing scrutiny.

At the same time, it is undeniable that many of the criticisms directed at capitalism by proponents of the nation-state are articulated through the conceptual framework of globalization. The historical evolution of the state as a key actor in the international system, its present position, and its future trajectory are widely debated within the context of capitalism and globalization. Moreover, scholarly inquiry increasingly focuses on the role played by the nation-state itself in the expansion of capitalism and in broadening the sphere of influence of globalization (Gubadova, et al., 2026).

Economic Sovereignty and Supranational Governance

One of the most significant consequences of globalization has been the free movement of goods and, more importantly, capital. This development has reduced the ability of national governments to exercise effective control over their domestic economies. As economic globalization deepened, exchange rates became systematically interconnected, and monetary policies ceased to be determined solely at the national level.

International institutions such as the European Customs Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank have contributed to the weakening of national economic sovereignty by imposing regulatory frameworks and policy conditionalities. Globalization has also generated economic, political, social, and environmental challenges that exceed the capacity of individual nation-states to manage independently. These challenges have necessitated greater international organization and the strengthening of supranational institutions.

The empowerment of international organizations, however, has simultaneously resulted in the erosion of national sovereignty. In Europe, the process of integration—culminating in the formation of the European Union (EU)—has produced a stable and durable supranational political structure based on economic interdependence. Member states of the EU have been compelled to transfer decision-making authority in many policy areas from national governments to EU institutions. Furthermore, the principle of subsidiarity, which delegates decision-making authority to local or municipal levels in certain domains, has also imposed constraints on traditional notions of national sovereignty (Hix, 2005).

The Resilience of the Nation-State

The assertion that globalization inevitably leads to the decline, weakening, or disappearance of the nation-state contains a degree of empirical validity. However, this perspective should not be interpreted as signaling the end of the nation-state as a political entity. Nation-states continue to function as the most significant actors within the international system.

What globalization has compelled is not the elimination of the nation-state but its transformation. Nation-states are increasingly required to abandon certain traditional economic, political, and social practices and to adapt to new global realities. While some states have undertaken these reforms in a timely and democratic manner, others have pursued them through non-democratic means or with significant delay. This divergence has produced uneven patterns of adaptation and resilience among nation-states (Asadov, 2025).

Conceptual Debates on Globalization

The concept of globalization is frequently used interchangeably with, or as a complement to, terms such as liberalization, universalization, Westernization, and interregional exchange. Among these, globalization is the most

recent and the most conceptually encompassing. Nevertheless, many scholars prefer to use one of the alternative concepts, largely depending on the specific meaning they attribute to globalization.

The fact that the concept of globalization incorporates the meanings and empirical realities associated with these other terms has contributed to significant conceptual ambiguity. In recent years, the increasing globalization of the concept itself has further intensified this confusion. While globalization is often employed as a phenomenon primarily associated with economic relations, it carries meanings that extend beyond transnational economic integration. Globalization reflects not only the Western liberal economic system but also Western ideological and political norms (Steger, 2017).

Interdependence and Economic Globalization

A defining characteristic of the contemporary international system is the unprecedented growth of interdependence among nations. Trade flows, investment, financial circulation, tourism, and technological change—particularly in transportation and communication—have intensified global interconnectedness. Although the forms of integration vary, regional economic integration has become increasingly prominent. Over time, economic integration tends to expand into legal, political, and social integration (Aliyev, 2025).

Any discussion of economic globalization must necessarily address the role of transnational corporations. While national structures have played a role in the initial formation of these corporations—at least in the short term—the globalization process itself has led to a decentralization of economic decision-making. Economic globalization signifies the liberalization of trade, capital flows, ideas, and market-based multilateral economic exchanges (Asadov, 2025).

Economic globalization can also be understood through international trade among national economies, foreign direct investment, short-term capital flows, international labor migration, and the diffusion of technology. Consequently, economic debates lie at the core of globalization discourse. States no longer possess the capacity to unilaterally govern the global economy.

Criticism of globalization is frequently articulated by anti-capitalist and anti-globalist movements, which argue that globalization exacerbates global inequality and renders poor countries even poorer. Additional critiques attribute the spread of HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and similar phenomena to the consequences of economic globalization (Aliyev, 2025).

A particularly contentious debate concerns whether economic globalization contributes to international peace. Closely related is the question of whether globalization reduces internal armed conflicts. While some scholars argue that economic globalization diminishes the likelihood of civil wars, others contend the opposite, and a third group maintains that globalization has no significant effect on internal conflict. Similar disagreements exist regarding the impact of economic globalization on democratization processes (Dreher, 2006).

Liberal Norms, Intervention, and Global Governance

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it has been argued that a liberal governance model emphasizing democracy and human rights—promoted by Western states and international organizations—has undergone globalization. Within this framework, the concept of humanitarian intervention has emerged, legitimizing international involvement in regions characterized by ethnic or religious conflict or perceived instability, particularly in small and medium-sized states.

Simultaneously, the number of states participating in international organizations has continued to increase, leading to greater complexity in decision-making processes. As a result, certain groups of states have assumed decision-making authority on behalf of others. This dynamic has contributed to growing skepticism regarding international cooperation and declining trust in international institutions.

According to Stephen Krasner, power in the contemporary international system is no longer concentrated solely within national governments but is distributed among private, public, international, regional, and national actors (Krasner, 2001). Moreover, globalization has undermined the traditional welfare-state model, a development that disproportionately affects less developed countries by deepening socioeconomic inequalities.

Globalization also influences domestic political dynamics, including the platforms of political parties, trade policies, and ideological orientations. These effects vary depending on a state's level of development and institutional capacity.

Social and Cultural Globalization

Alongside economic and political globalization, the global social structure has undergone profound and often unexpected transformations, particularly as a result of advancements in transportation and communication technologies. A process initiated by the Industrial Revolution has evolved into a technological revolution characterized by satellite systems and digital connectivity, effectively transforming the world into a “global village.” These technological advancements have reduced disparities among societies and facilitated the emergence of shared standards in culture, education, entertainment, and technology-based services. At the same time, they have generated radical changes in the traditional relationship between the nation-state and society, weakening the influence of

institutions such as labor unions and agricultural movements while reshaping political and social power structures (Castells, 2010).

Non-Governmental Organizations and Cultural Hegemony

The growing influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provides further evidence of globalization's impact. Globalization has heightened awareness of issues such as sustainable development, natural resource depletion, and environmental degradation. Global challenges—including climate change—have prompted coordinated responses involving international organizations, states, and NGOs.

Globalization has also intensified the economic and cultural influence of transnational corporations, contributing to forms of cultural dominance often described as “neo-colonialism” or “Coca-colonization.” This phenomenon is commonly associated with the spread of popular culture (Ahmadov, 2025).

The social and cultural dimensions of globalization—often interpreted as Americanization or, more broadly, Westernization—are characterized by the concentration of information and technological power in a limited number of states. The dissemination of lifestyles, values, and norms through global media networks has been further facilitated by reduced transportation costs, advanced communication technologies, and NGO-supported transnational mobilization. In this sense, social and cultural globalization represents one of the most significant challenges to the traditional nation-state.

Globalization in International Relations Theory

Debates on globalization within international relations theory generally take two forms. The first concerns the definition of globalization itself—what it means and how it should be conceptualized. The second represents a reconfiguration of the longstanding debate between state-centric and non-state-centric theories.

Compared to other social sciences, discussions of globalization in international relations often carry a more critical tone. Globalization theories that fundamentally challenge the state-centric assumptions of realism and neorealism argue that states are losing their centrality, and in some cases, that they are becoming obsolete. From this perspective, globalization is portrayed as a transformative force that fundamentally reshapes the structure of the international system (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2020).

Approaches to Globalization

One of the main reasons globalizations remains difficult to theorize and evaluate is that it is fundamentally interdisciplinary. Although globalization studies became a significant component of social theory after the 1970s, international relations (IR) began to treat it as a major analytical concern mainly from the 1990s onward. Globalization is frequently presented both as a concept and as a process/phenomenon, yet there is still no stable consensus regarding its methodology, meaning, or the precise domains in which its effects are most decisive (Gubadova, et al., 2026).

Even in the absence of a single, universally accepted definition, the scale and intensity of globalization have undeniably expanded. There is broad agreement that profound transformations have occurred across economic, political, technological, and socio-cultural spheres. The unresolved question, however, is whether these transformations match the stronger claims of globalization's supporters, or whether they are overstated by critics and skeptics who argue that globalization is often used as a rhetorical “container concept” to explain diverse and sometimes unrelated changes. Many critical perspectives further contend that globalization carries and institutionalizes a particular value system, frequently associated with neoliberal policy doctrines, and therefore must be examined not only descriptively but also normatively.

Globalization and International Relations Theory

International relations does not possess a single unified “globalization theory” as such; rather, established theories contain globalization-related propositions, and globalization has opened new empirical and conceptual spaces for the development of existing frameworks. In a direct sense, globalization has become a cross-cutting phenomenon for the social sciences as a whole.

Within IR, neoliberal institutionalism (and related liberal approaches) has been among the most explicit in mobilizing globalization to critique core realist and neorealist assumptions. In this line of argument, globalization is associated with several interrelated claims:

- Sovereignty and policy autonomy are increasingly contested because cross-border processes often escape the direct control of national authorities.
- Globalization is linked to the expansion of large-scale, complex problems that exceed the managerial capacity of individual states.
- Global governance—through institutions and regimes operating beyond national borders—has reached a scale capable of transforming the character of world politics, thereby reshaping the functional “space” of the nation-state.

- A multi-layered and multi-level political landscape expands the number and influence of actors beyond the state, weakening the claim that states are always the primary and exclusive actors.
- With economic globalization, mobile capital seeks to avoid costly legal fragmentation; consequently, states adjust domestic legal frameworks and, in some areas, contribute to the emergence of more standardized transnational legal norms (Savran, 2008).

Taken together, these propositions suggest that globalization is not merely a theoretical counterpoint to realism and neorealism; it also attempts to demonstrate—at least in its stronger versions—that the historical era of the classical nation-state is waning. At the same time, the central dispute in IR often becomes less about “globalization” itself and more about the competing worldviews of realism and liberalism: whether power, survival, and security remain the organizing principles of international politics, or whether interdependence, institutions, and transnational processes now reconfigure those principles (Rasulev, et al., 2026).

A Realist Response: Barry Buzan's Perspective

From a more state-centered perspective, Barry Buzan argues that although globalization transforms the environment in which states operate, it does not abolish state power or remove the realist character of international politics. In his view, certain attributes of the state continue, and the state remains crucial—even if it is no longer absolutely decisive under the influence of transnational issues and organizations. This position can be summarized through several interconnected points:

1. Globalization is often primarily an economic phenomenon, involving issue areas that classical realism previously treated as “low politics.”
2. While interest in these issue areas has increased, international politics continues to preserve its realist features, especially in matters of security and strategic competition.
3. Even if states exercise sovereignty independently of economic globalization in many contexts, they may still cooperate regionally or globally in specific circumstances based on mutual interests.
4. Economic globalization and transnational governance mechanisms have become widespread, yet the state-centric structure of international politics remains deeply embedded; globalization reshapes how states act, rather than making them irrelevant (Buzan, 2010).

This approach suggests a “middle” position: globalization constrains and transforms state capabilities in some domains, but does not eliminate the state as a principal actor. The analytical emphasis thus shifts toward differentiation—which functions of the state are weakened, which are reconfigured, and which remain resilient.

Conclusion: Globalization and Localization in Contemporary World Politics

When contemporary trends of global change are examined, another prominent phenomenon appears alongside globalization: localization (or localism). In recent years, localization has become increasingly widespread as both an analytical concept and a policy orientation. Localization can be understood as the effort to think globally while strengthening local governance capacity, integrating into the world economy, and empowering local authorities within states (Aliyev, 2025).

Localization is particularly important for reinforcing local democracy, since local governments constitute the administrative layer closest to citizens. As human needs become increasingly diverse and complex, the responsibility of meeting local demands expands. Consequently, local governance institutions must develop more specialized and multidimensional service capacities. In this sense, globalization and localization should not necessarily be treated as opposites; rather, they often develop in parallel as part of a broader transformation of governance, legitimacy, and political participation (Rasulev, et al., 2026).

Ultimately, the nation-state remains central to international relations, but it increasingly operates within a multi-level environment shaped by global markets, international institutions, transnational actors, technological networks, and empowered local authorities. The key challenge for contemporary political systems is therefore not simply “whether” globalization exists, but how political authority, accountability, and social justice can be maintained amid intensified interdependence and shifting governance structures.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with internationally accepted ethical standards for academic research. The research is theoretical and analytical in nature and does not involve human participants, personal data, or confidential information. All sources have been appropriately cited, and intellectual property rights have been respected throughout the study.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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