

Actors in Global Politics

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Drawn from: Nossal's International Relations, Goldstein & Whitworth's International Relations, Sens & Stoett's Global Politics, and Peterson & Runyan's Global Gender Issues

State Actors

States/Countries

- considered the main actor(s) in global politics (contested)
- usual elements (weight of each is dependent on context & other factors):
 - people
 - land
 - control' over the people & land (armed force, constitution, etc.)
 - recognition by other states (especially in the UN)
 - official agents who can carry out affairs of state
- Diplomats:
 - "agents responsible for conducting and maintaining relations between political communities" (Nossal, 157)
 - usually work in the foreign ministry of a state
 - functions:
 1. represent their state in other countries
 2. explaining and pressing their state's interests
 3. communication between state
 4. negotiate for their state
 5. compile intelligence and information about the country they are stationed in
 6. handle requests for visas and deal with situation of fellow country-people in their stationed-country
 7. advise their state leaders
 8. reduce friction between states
- Armed forces:
 - "all agents of a political community who are organized to kill other human beings on command" (Nossal, 158)
 - divided into different agencies/department/units based on functions or skills
 - sometimes involves 'private' or 'para-military' forces hired by the state
- Secret service:
 - agencies providing security for the state beyond that of the military
 - often, used where using military is not politically feasible (ie. would be a declaration of war) or else where more mobile or stealth approach is needed (eg. counter-terrorism)
 - offensive intelligence agencies: operations outside of their state

- defensive intelligence agencies: operations inside their state
- includes para-military or police forces and special agents providing security for particular leaders or individuals

Sub-national Governments

- non-central government actors: cities, provinces, cantons, states
- usually found in federated systems

Intergovernmental Organizations

- Explosive growth
 - 1909: 37
 - 1960: 180
 - 1997: 400+
- Why created?
 - Coordination & communication between states
 - Serve broader purpose versus state's narrowly pursuing national interests
 - 'Cost effective', economies of scale
- Characteristics
 - Composed only of states
 - Treaties between states < international law
 - Regular meetings of delegates from member states
 - Delegates represent policies/interest of their state
 - Permanent headquarters & secretariat
- Functions
 - Instruments of joint state action (or coordinated global oppression?)
 - Communication & conflict management (or 'socializing' states to dominant views?)
 - International regulation (or unenforceable legal façade?)
 - Distribution of finances, goods, or services (or preventing changes to global status quo?)
- Types
 - Multi-purpose, universal
 - Many functions
 - All states can join
 - Examples?
 - Regional, functional
 - Specified purposes
 - States from specific geographic areas

Non-State Actors

Non-Governmental Organizations

- definition:
 - institutionally separate from governments
 - operate on a not-for-profit basis

- types:
 - economic interests
 - social issues
 - moral concerns
 - environmental issues
 - racial issues
 - political issues
- 40,000+
- types
 - humanitarian groups: alleviate human suffering, organize relief efforts
 - human rights groups: "concern over how humans everywhere are treated and whether their rights are being respected" (Nossal, 143)
 - environmental groups: dealing with environmental degradation and destruction of planetary ecosystem
- NGOs have increased their importance in global politics -- in states themselves, and through recognized/regularized roles in IGOs

Global Corporations

- Globalization of businesses begins to happen alongside the expansion of mercantilist states -- 1400s onwards
- Modern phenomenon begins in the 1950s-1960s, and booms after the 1970s
- 40,000 MNCs -- mostly headquartered in US, Japan, and European Union states
- Types:
 - MNCs: national companies with foreign subsidiaries
 - TNCs: global, non-national entities with multiple operations around the world engaged in diverse businesses
 - International business alliances: loose cooperation among different companies from different countries
 - emerged as global players in the last 30 years
- operate beyond their home state's borders -- usually have head offices in their home state, but have subsidiaries and branch plants in other states
- "organize a supply, production, assembly, distribution, and marketing on a global basis, seeking to take advantage of differential rates of wage labour, working conditions, government regulations, and rates of education and literacy, to rationalize production and maximize return on investment" (Kim Richard Nossal)
- Decisions by managers, CEOs, etc., of MNCS can alter the situation of a state dramatically -- creating or destroying jobs, investment climate, political stability, etc.

Financiers

- "among the most important international actors" (Nossal)
 - finance the global economy

- "provide the funds that underwrite the global economy" (Nossal)
- private actors:
 - hedge-funds
 - stock exchanges (TSE, NYSE)
 - bond-rating firms (Moody's, Standard&Poors)
- inter-state actors:
 - Central banks (the Fed, the Bank of Canada, Bundesbank)
 - International Monetary Fund
 - World Bank
- capital flight:
 - "large-scale withdrawal of investment" -- destabilize economy and massive costs to the society (Nossal, 128)
 - mobility of capital -- and financiers' support -- leaves some states at the mercy of financial sector

Women's Movements

- organized around issues affecting/involving women, but also including relationship between men and women
- broadened to examine the concept of gender and how that plays into women's politics and movements
- involves a wide spectrum of approaches to women's issues -- from feminist approaches to conservative approaches

Religious Movements

- various levels of institutionalization and congealing
- movements which are driven by particular religious beliefs and often seek to propagate/spread those beliefs
- many have grown with globalization to become transnational
- increasingly involved in politics and taking on roles in global conflicts/issues

Think Tanks

- definition: "an institution, usually but not always a not-for-profit nongovernmental organization, that exists primarily to engage in research and thinking about policy questions" (Nossal, 150)
- often linked to social or ideological movements

Media and Global Politics

- VietNam War: 'living room war' -- body bags on TV
 - Broadcasting of horrors turned public opinion against US
 - Since then, strict controls on information and dissemination of information
 - Gulf War ('Nintendo war')
 - No body bags, brutality, or any actual fighting
- Media as "source" for information & outlet for propaganda/message of states, terrorists, etc.

- The Internet: Governments, NGOs, broadcasters, etc. are all vying to get on to the Internet
- Speed of information and quantity is overwhelming all actors
- Analyzing the media's impact
 - Used by government officials, lay people, and others
 - Agenda-setting: promotes certain issues onto governments' agendas
 - Shared perceptions: influence or construct public opinion, provide suggestions for action and policy
 - Influencing decision-makers: officials and actors rely on information from media, and affect their policy perceptions
 - Embarrassing government: shame into action or non-action

"Criminal" Actors

- Pirates:
 - gangs of seafarers who board and take control of ships, especially merchant ships
 - 2008: 300+ attacks
 - mostly focussed on Southeast Asia trading and sea routes
- Slavers:
 - slavery continues in parts of Africa and Asia – and transportation to North America, Europe, etc.
 - includes perpetually bonded labour, including children = 8 million+ enslaved every year
 - international NGOs involved in trying to eliminate it or buying slaves' freedom
- Sex Traders:
 - 'white slavery' -- abduction of 'white' girls who are sold into domestic service & sexual slavery in 'non-white' world
 - 'sex slavery' -- smugglers bringing girls/women from one state to another for a fee, and then enslaving the girls/women in prostitution in order for them to pay back the fees-owed
 - young children: in brothels in various developing states, servicing mostly travelling North Americans, Japanese, and Western Europeans
- Smugglers/Mafias:
 - many different types, and located all over the world
 - what is being smuggled?
 - children
 - arms
 - drugs
 - animal parts
 - Drug-runners -- likely most numerous smugglers
 - narcotics
 - key sources of drugs: Southeast Asia, Central Western Asia, and northern South America

- key market: USA
 - lucrative employment and income for farmers and others in Southern countries
- (in)famous drug/prostitution/etc. cartels or mafia: Colombian Medellin & Cali, Japanese yakuza, Italian mafia, Russian mafia
- Mercenaries:
 - they are not actually illegal, but their role is rendered legal by governments which hire them
 - most well-known: Executive Outcomes, Blackwater
 - ex-soldiers, police, and security officials
 - millions of dollars to hire them to fight rebels, kidnapping, assassinations, espionage, etc.

Terrorists

- definition:
 - incorrect: anyone who uses violence for political purposes which we do not agree with
 - correct: "*anyone* who uses terror as a political instrument is a terrorist" (Nossal, 151)
- terror is not just physical, but can also be in the form of pronouncements, propaganda, etc.
- Nossal notes that if only measured in terms of numbers of terrorized or killed, states would be the most common/significant terrorists (Nossal 151)
- types:
 - governmental terrorism -- bureaucratized, routine, institutionalized
 - nongovernmental terrorism -- dramatic, violent, random, and very obvious (in order to garner media attention)
 - domestic terrorism: terrorists are from the same country in which the terrorist acts take place
 - international terrorism: terrorists are from a country (or countries) different than the one with the terrorist acts take place
 - state-sponsored

Questions

- Which actors are missing?
- Has global politics been complicated by having so many actors? Did global politics ever not have all these actors?
- How has media changed the way in which actors can or do conduct themselves in global politics?
- Is the state still the most important actor in global politics?