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University of the Americas, Ecuador
Daniel Crespo Cuesta,
Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador

*CORRESPONDENCE

Damiano Scotton
✉ dscotton@uazuay.edu.ec

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Shifting perspectives: can supranationality solve international problems?

Damiano Scotton ^{1*} and Diana Alexandra García-Orellana ^{1,2}

¹Escuela de Estudios Internacionales, Universidad del Azuay, Cuenca, Ecuador, ²Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local, Universitat de Valencia, Valencia, Spain

This article offers a structural critique of state sovereignty as the foundation of the contemporary international order. Drawing on historical, theoretical, and normative perspectives, it explores the exclusionary origins of the modern state, its limitations in the context of globalization, and the inadequacy of its homogenizing logic in addressing collective identity pluralism. The paper argues that sovereignty has functioned not as a guarantor of peace or recognition, but rather as a mechanism of exclusion and fragmentation. In contrast, it advocates for a shift toward supranational models of governance grounded in universal citizenship, inclusion, and plural representation. By analyzing cases such as the European Union and other regional organizations, the article highlights the potential of pluralist supranationality as a viable and desirable alternative for a more just and sustainable international order. Furthermore, it examines the resurgence of populist and nationalist discourses, especially in the United States, as symptomatic of a deeper structural crisis within the state-centric international system. These developments underscore the urgency of reimagining global governance beyond the constraints of sovereign politics.

KEYWORDS

state sovereignty, universal citizenship, supranationality, regional integration, pluralism, nationalism, global governance

1 Introduction

The history of the nation-state, as we know it today, does not reflect a natural evolution of culturally homogeneous communities, but rather a process shaped by power interests, the dismantling of previous political forms, and top-down impositions of territorial boundaries. Far from being the spontaneous result of shared cultural affinities, the modern state has often been a construct serving the individual ambitions of ruling elites and the assertion of exclusive sovereignty, subordinating internal diversity to a centralized national identity.

This paper adopts a critical reading of the sovereign state as the basic unit of the international order, aiming to question not only its origins but also its current relevance. Throughout the text, we examine how state sovereignty, rather than ensuring peaceful coexistence and the recognition of differences, has historically operated as an instrument of cultural homogenization, political exclusion, and international competition. From the principle of “*Cuius Regio, Eius Religio*” to the nationalisms of the 21st century, through the process of decolonization and the consolidation of postcolonial states, we observe how the ideal of sovereignty has prevailed even at the expense of human rights, the self-determination of peoples, and multilateral cooperation.

In this context, the urgent need arises to rethink the foundations of the contemporary international system. Through the study of supranational experiences such as the European Union and other regional organizations, we propose an alternative to the state-national model: a form of organization based on pluralism, transnational citizenship, and the progressive overcoming of the sovereigntist paradigm. Rather than eliminating the state, the goal is to redefine its role within a global order capable of responding to the challenges of the present and future: interdependence, structural inequality, environmental crisis, and the need for a new pact of coexistence among peoples. In light of this analysis, the paper also engages with the contemporary resurgence of populist and nationalist movements, particularly in the Global North. Far from being isolated phenomena, these movements reflect deeper structural tensions within the international system, such as the growing disillusionment with globalization, rising socioeconomic inequality, and the erosion of trust in multilateral institutions. By invoking sovereignty as a response to perceived elite domination and cultural threat, populist discourses reinforce the myth of the nation-state as the ultimate guarantor of identity and protection. This rhetorical strategy, often characterized by anti-globalist sentiment and unilateralism, not only obstructs efforts toward regional integration, but also reveals the fragile legitimacy of the sovereign order in a world that is increasingly interdependent.

2 The sovereign state: historical and theoretical foundations

2.1 The birth of the modern state

In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg established the principle of “*Cuius Regio, Eius Religio*,” which granted German princes within the Holy Roman Empire the freedom to choose the religion they wished to impose in their own territories (Osiander, 2001). This principle undermined imperial authority, as the Emperor derived his power from the Pope, the representative of the Catholic Church whose authority, however, was not recognized by the princes who distanced themselves from Catholicism. In 1648, with the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia, the German princes of the Schmalkaldic League achieved formal independence from imperial power. Religion was used as an *instrumentum regni* in this process, enabling the princes to separate themselves from imperial control and to govern without external interference (Skinner, 1978). The treaty not only reaffirmed the principle established in 1555 but also, and more importantly, guaranteed the princes full autonomy in both their internal affairs and foreign relations, thus giving rise to the principle of sovereignty.

2.2 Sovereignty and homogenization

This historical context, typically narrated from the perspective of the “powerful,” often overlooks the experience of the people themselves, who merely transitioned from imperial domination to more localized rule without a substantial change in their condition (Tilly, 1992). In other words, the birth of the nation-state responded more to the independence aspirations of rulers than to those of

the governed. In fact, it would take the spread of the ideals of the French Revolution, between 1789 and 1815, for the nation-state to begin to be seen as a representative entity of the individual citizen, one for whom civic engagement and national belonging became meaningful. The “statality of the individual,” meaning the full incorporation of the person into the political structure and identity of the state, is then a product of the establishment of the state, not its cause.

From this brief analysis, it becomes clear that the state is more akin to a shirt tailored to fit the individual already constrained to live within it, rather than an institution custom-made for them (Gellner, 1983). As a result, within today’s “melting pot” of states, numerous nationalities, visions, and cultures coexist, often in mutual tension or outright opposition. In fact, it is now almost impossible to speak of a “nation-state” in substantive terms, as nearly all states today are composed of multiple nationalities, some of which have integrated positively into the state they happen to inhabit (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). Others, however, do not feel represented and are sometimes even marginalized or persecuted by the dominant vision within the state; these groups seek greater autonomy or even full independence. In line with this analysis, Brubaker (1996) has argued that the notion of the nation-state as a culturally homogeneous unit is both historically constructed and empirically untenable in the contemporary world. His work reframes nationalism as a form of identity politics that is mobilized to reinforce state sovereignty, often at the expense of internal diversity. This perspective further confirms that the state, rather than being a neutral arbiter of collective identity, has operated as a mechanism of exclusion that privileges dominant cultural narratives while marginalizing or silencing others.

Our contemporary reality presents numerous examples of such cases: Catalonia in Spain, South Tyrol in Italy, the indigenous nationalities of South America, and the various ethnic groups residing in the states of Africa and Asia. These peoples, despite their widely differing historical contexts, share a common pursuit: greater autonomy or outright independence from the states in which they currently reside.

The core problem is that this need for autonomy directly clashes with the very essence of the state, which is oriented toward preserving its territorial integrity and often responds to any attempts at secession or even autonomy with vehemence and, at times, violence (Buchanan, 1991).

3 The contemporary state: a failed entity

3.1 Nationalism and identity construction

As discussed in the previous section, the modern state emerged on extremely fragile foundations, driven more by the self-interest of rulers than by the will of the people. Throughout history, various attempts have been made by governments to create a “national consciousness” among their populations, some of which have had strong, albeit temporary, effects.

In 19th-century Europe and during the first half of the 20th century, we witnessed the rise of nationalisms that contributed to the outbreak of the two World Wars. In the Americas, education

systems played a significant role in fostering a “patriotic identity” among citizens, based on values such as freedom and opportunity in the case of the United States, or sovereignty and independence in South American countries (Hobsbawm, 1992). Rather than valuing the ethnic and national diversity within state borders, these efforts aimed to construct an “ideological community” in which all citizens were unified in patriotic devotion.

Clearly, such initiatives can be seen as superficial “patches” that attempt to retroactively resolve a deeper structural issue. The reinforcement of national identity, often through the creation of artificial common values, has led to the cultural erasure or, at the very least, the reduction, of smaller communities’ distinct characteristics into local idiosyncrasies and “exotic” expressions, interesting perhaps, but of little relevance at the level of state recognition (Spivak, 1988).

The very concept of “plurinationality,” now widely acknowledged in both international and national legal documents, remains in practice a symbolic gesture with few concrete implications. From a state perspective, this is understandable: as we have argued, meaningful recognition of internal diversity runs counter to the perceived need for unity within the state. A strong recognition of difference risks undermining the cohesion, and thus the viability, of an already relatively fragile institutional structure.

3.2 Multiculturalism and the failure to recognize diversity

The failure to accommodate internal diversity is not merely a political shortcoming, but a normative one. Kymlicka (1995) has convincingly argued that liberal democracies must move beyond a one-size-fits-all model of citizenship and instead recognize group-differentiated rights, especially for national minorities and cultural communities. His theory of multicultural citizenship highlights the necessity of integrating plural identities within a shared political framework that affirms, rather than suppresses, diversity.

We therefore understand the state, with full awareness, as a “failed entity.” It is a structure that has attempted to survive the passage of centuries but that, in historical terms, has very quickly proven incapable of addressing the challenges posed by today’s hyper-globalized world. With an institutional lifespan of roughly 400 years, the contemporary sovereign state is now an anachronistic and unsustainable model.

This anachronism and unsustainability became particularly evident after World War II and throughout the Cold War period. On one hand, the system of strongly sovereign and independent states, states that were to be defended at all costs and constantly sought greater self-sufficiency, led to major conflicts, dramatic human rights violations, and, in response, the need to define and universalize these rights in the 1948 Universal Declaration and its subsequent instruments (Mazower, 2009). In this context, any state could be considered a potential enemy, and the survival of the nation became paramount. This logic was underpinned by nationalism, which served as a unifying force for many peoples (Breuilly, 1993).

However, as this unifying force waned, particularly with the creation of international dialogue forums and the rise of

international law that diminished the emphasis on nationalism and absolute sovereignty, the differences between peoples within single states began to resurface and intensify from the 1960s onward.

Another crucial moment came with the decolonization process of the 1950s to the 1970s. The principle of self-determination, timidly proposed by Woodrow Wilson in 1919, was now seen as an international necessity. However, this principle was largely limited to those peoples still under colonial rule in the second half of the 20th century, while it remained out of reach for those who had long been subsumed within existing state structures (Manela, 2007). In the African context, this led to a rapid wave of independence movements, and within about two decades, the continent was divided into formally independent states, states that were, however, mostly poor.

This independence did not translate into genuine self-determination. Instead of granting self-governance to peoples, the process reorganized them into state entities based exclusively on colonial partitions. These new states followed the Western model already widespread around the globe, though not necessarily successful, leading to a widespread absence of patriotic sentiment and dividing the continent into political entities with fluid borders. These borders were relevant to governments, segments of the population, and the international community, but not to most of the peoples living within them (Herbst, 2000).

In summary, although the international reality has changed dramatically since the mid-20th century, and these changes have revealed the limitations of the state as the ultimate political unit, no attempt has been made to imagine a new global political system from scratch that would deemphasize the state. Instead, efforts have focused on adapting the state to new global circumstances, without recognizing, or perhaps without wanting to recognize, the fundamental incompatibility between the state model and emerging global realities. As a result, existing tensions have only intensified.

4 Sovereignty or supranationality?

4.1 Rethinking sovereignty

The *Ventotene Manifesto*, written in 1941 by the Italian anti-fascist politicians Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, and today regarded as one of the foundational ideological texts of the European Union, denounces the transformation of the nation into a quasi-sacred entity, detached from its origins as a historical and cultural construct. The nation is no longer conceived as a social and historical outcome of a progressive evolution of shared values, customs, and aspirations. Instead, it has come to be viewed as a nearly divine organism, endowed with an autonomous and self-referential character, focused exclusively on its own aggrandizement, even at the expense of others. This logic has fueled an international dynamic in which states, perceiving each other as threats, continuously seek to expand their territorial influence to ensure self-sufficiency, thus establishing a competitive framework that can only be resolved through the dominance of the strongest (Spinelli and Rossi, 2006).

This reflection reinforces the core thesis of this paper: the state should be understood as an administrative structure aimed

at facilitating coexistence and cooperation among peoples, not as a supreme entity that monopolizes identities or exercises absolute power. Along the same lines, Professor Antonio Papisca argues that the new international law has brought about the recognition of a universal citizenship that supersedes national citizenships. This citizenship is based on the human condition and is defined by the set of fundamental rights formally recognized as inherent by current international law. According to Papisca, this transformation is not an idealistic aspiration but a concrete legal evolution that redefines the normative global framework. In this context, traditional criteria for citizenship, such as *ius sanguinis* and *ius soli*, must give way to a higher principle: *ius humanae dignitatis*, the dignity of the human being as the ultimate foundation of law. This vision promotes full citizenship that is simultaneously universal and plural, constructed based on inclusion and the recognition of diversity as a normative standard, affirming the predominance of *ius soli* as the most inclusive criterion (Papisca, 2006).

The problem, therefore, does not lie in the existence of the state *per se*, or in its legitimacy as a political entity, which, if properly understood, is both valid and potentially beneficial. Rather, the issue lies in the interpretation of the state as a “supreme” entity capable of defining individual identity and representing the very essence of its citizens, ultimately placing the state above any other political subject and as the final authority in the international arena (Habermas, 2001). State sovereignty, so widely proclaimed, affirmed, and defended across the political spectrum, regardless of differences in how its scope is understood is, in reality, a smokescreen concealing the fear of radically changing our international system. This fear frames such change as unfeasible, impossible, or even harmful.

This concern is reflected in how states currently perceive various regional integration organizations that have proliferated since the second half of the 20th century. Examples include the Arab League, the European Union, the Andean Community of Nations, Mercosur, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the African Union, and the trade agreements between the United States, Canada, and Mexico (NAFTA – USMCA), among many others. While the emergence and growth of such organizations have generally been supported by most of the world’s countries and are seen in a positive light, there remains a clear reluctance among states to delegate increasing powers to them, driven once again by the fear of “excessive loss of sovereignty” (Zürn, 2000).

Sovereignty continues to be perceived, even today, as a *conditio sine qua non* for international equilibrium, despite the fact that it has been a primary factor behind many of the system’s disruptions and imbalances (Krasner, 1999). Sovereignty is often viewed by both governments and populations as a necessary and intrinsically positive characteristic of the state, without recognizing that it is, in fact, the sole mechanism sustaining the state’s relevance. Its defense is not grounded in a true commitment to harmonious coexistence among peoples, but in the fear that reducing sovereignty would lead to a gradual decline in the importance of states themselves.

What we have rarely asked, if ever, is whether that decline in relevance would indeed be harmful to international coexistence, or whether, on the contrary, it might actually be beneficial.

Governments have portrayed the reduction of sovereignty as a threat that would strip the state of its core identity and replace it with mere administrative functions, ultimately worsening people’s living conditions. It is often argued that, although regional integration is a positive goal, like all forms of interstate cooperation, existing differences between countries within the same region limit or even make such integration impossible.

In a previous article, Scottton (2021) defined what we refer to as “integration mirages,” or in other words, “false limits to integration.” It is not our intention here to revisit a topic that has already been discussed in detail; rather, we simply wish to emphasize the heart of the matter: the idea that what we often consider as obstacles to integration are, in fact, challenges that integration itself could help solve. For example, disparities in development levels among countries could be mitigated through close collaboration; unemployment could be reduced through access to a much broader and restriction-free labor market; and trade imbalances could be addressed through unrestricted access to a vastly expanded common market, among other possibilities.

In short, we argue that the reduction of sovereignty would not lead to chaos or increased instability; on the contrary, it would help resolve many of the very problems for which sovereignty itself is largely responsible.

4.2 The construction of supranationality

After this extensive critique of state sovereignty, its reach and its necessity, we must now turn to the task of construction. We have forcefully argued that state sovereignty is not a fundamental element of the international system, challenging much of the classical theory in International Relations. We maintain that it is, in fact, one of the primary causes of the system’s most persistent problems. Nonetheless, it is clear that we live in an international context that, *volens nolens*, remains grounded in the concept of sovereignty, and that resists change, not because change would necessarily result in fewer benefits for the people, but because states and their governments fear the loss of their own relevance. Ironically, the reduction of state sovereignty could in fact increase the benefits available to their populations.

The good news is that international structures capable of promoting such supranationality already exist. The European Union may be considered a “non-state state” in that it possesses all the essential characteristics of a state (Schütze, 2012). If we accept the classical political theory that a state requires three core elements, territory, people, and sovereignty, we can identify the EU’s territory as the combined territory of its member states, and its people as the collective of European citizens, formally recognized under Article 9 of the Treaty on European Union and Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. These treaties enumerate the rights and duties that underpin the legal status of European citizenship. Internally, sovereignty is exercised through supranational institutions such as the European Parliament (legislative), the European Commission (executive), and the European Court of Justice (judicial). Externally, sovereignty is expressed through the European External Action Service,

established by Article 27 of the Lisbon Treaty, with diplomatic representations around the world.

While the European Union thus possesses all the characteristics of a state, including a degree of supranationality in various domains, we describe it as a “non-state state” because it lacks international recognition as a state. This is not due to any objective deficiency, but rather to a lack of political will among its member states who continue to preserve significant decision-making power through the prominent role assigned to the European Council.

The case of the European Union’s monetary integration further illustrates both the potential and the complexity of supranational governance. The establishment of the Eurozone represents one of the most ambitious examples of sovereignty pooling, yet it has also exposed structural challenges inherent to such integration. According to the theory of Optimal Currency Areas (OCA), as theorized by [Mundell \(1961\)](#), a common currency can only function effectively when participating economies exhibit sufficient convergence in their business cycles and possess mechanisms to absorb asymmetric economic shocks. The Eurozone debt crisis demonstrated how divergences in fiscal policies, labor mobility, and economic resilience among member states can strain the system when confronted with external or internal shocks. Nevertheless, despite these significant tensions, the Euro continues to stand as a unique example of a supranational monetary union, unmatched by any other regional integration efforts worldwide. It highlights that effective supranationality requires not only the transfer of political authority but also economic harmonization to sustain stability over time.

The same argument could be made for other regional organizations such as the Andean Community of Nations, Mercosur, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the African Union. These entities already have, to varying degrees, sufficiently solid institutional foundations that could allow them to evolve into state-like actors on the international stage. However, despite their institutional foundations, these regional organizations have repeatedly struggled to consolidate deeper forms of integration due to persistent sovereignty concerns. In South America, for instance, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), originally established to foster political coordination and common policies, has effectively collapsed as a result of ideological divergences and the unwillingness of member states to delegate binding authority to supranational bodies. Similarly, the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) have experienced chronic stagnation, with member countries often privileging national economic priorities over regional policy convergence. As [Malamud \(2011\)](#) observes, the reluctance to yield sovereignty has systematically undermined the potential of South American integration efforts to achieve meaningful supranational governance. These examples demonstrate that, without a genuine supranational framework capable of overcoming sovereignty-centered resistance, regional integration remains fragile and limited in its capacity to address shared challenges and generate long-term stability.

Yet, despite these obstacles, the supranational path remains a viable alternative for overcoming the structural limitations of sovereignty. Achieving this ambitious goal would make it possible to transcend the nation-state model and create regions defined by a

mosaic of identities, where each people, no matter how small, would be represented. These peoples could enjoy greater autonomy than they currently find within the nation-state system, without needing to conform to a singular national identity. At the same time, they would benefit from the protection of a regional “umbrella,” a supranational organization whose identity would not be grounded in homogeneity but would instead arise precisely from its plurality of identities, as reflected in the European Union’s motto: “Unity in Diversity.”

5 Populism, nationalism, and the return of the sovereign myth

5.1 National identity and populist rhetoric in the United States

Nationalism is a political ideology and belief that the sovereignty, interests, and identity of one’s own nation should prevail over other states and groups of people. The term itself is difficult to define, both because its meaning has shifted over time and context, and because it is often associated with widely divergent political movements ([LibertiesEU, 2021](#)).

Populism, on the other hand, is a political strategy that seeks to appeal to “the people” by positioning them in opposition to “the elites,” who are blamed for worsening the lives of ordinary citizens. Like nationalism, populism is not intrinsically tied to any specific political ideology. The two often overlap, particularly in the case of authoritarian populism.

[Gellner \(1983\)](#), [Anderson \(1983\)](#), and [Smith \(1991\)](#) are key figures in nationalism theory, each offering a distinct perspective on the nature and origins of the phenomenon. Gellner links nationalism to modernization and the transition to industrial society, arguing that it is a political principle that fosters a culturally homogeneous unity. Anderson, in contrast, conceives of the nation as an “imagined community,” emphasizing the role of print media in shaping national consciousness. Smith focuses on “ethnicity” and “culture” as pre-existing elements that give rise to nations.

In addressing the concept of populism, it is essential to consider the typology proposed by [Panizza \(2009\)](#), who identifies three main analytical approaches, each with internal variations. The first is based on empirical generalizations, an approach that seeks to identify recurring features across populist cases in order to build a typology of common attributes that help define the phenomenon ([Panizza, 2009](#), p. 17).

The second approach is that of historicist explanations, which link populism to specific social formations or particular historical contexts, such as moments of representational crisis or structural transition ([Laclau, 2005](#); [Knight, 1998](#)). From this perspective, populism is not understood as a fixed ideology, but rather as a contextual response to specific sociopolitical conditions.

Finally, [Panizza \(2009\)](#) outlines a third approach: the non-essentialist or discursive perspective, influenced by Ernesto Laclau’s theory of discourse. This approach views populism as a political logic that constructs an antagonism between a homogeneous “people,” depicted as those “from below,” and an exclusionary “elite” or “other,” characterized as those “from above.” It reduces the political space symbolically to an irreconcilable dichotomy

(Laclau, 2005; Panizza, 2009). This perspective allows populism to be understood not as a fixed ideological content, but as a way of articulating heterogeneous demands through the construction of a political frontier.

On the other hand, it is important to mention the work of Freeden (2003) that characterizes populism as a “thin-centered ideology,” meaning an ideological formation with a limited conceptual architecture that lacks the internal complexity to constitute a fully developed political doctrine on its own. As such, populism must be supplemented by more comprehensive or “thicker” ideologies—such as nationalism, socialism, or conservatism—to articulate coherent political agendas. Its core is structured around three central claims: the idealization of “the people” as a unified, virtuous, and morally superior collective; the denunciation of a “corrupt elite” that undermines the will of the people; and the call for a direct and unmediated form of leadership that embodies and enacts this popular will. This binary and antagonistic conception of politics, which posits a virtuous “us” against a morally illegitimate “them,” fosters a Manichean and moralized political discourse that is inherently at odds with the principles of democratic pluralism.

In this sense, both populism and nationalism, according to Freeden (2003), can be understood as thin ideologies: they possess salient but narrow ideological cores, insufficient to address the full spectrum of political life without drawing from broader ideological traditions. Their potency lies not in ideological completeness but in their capacity to act as ideological catalysts, reshaping and reinterpreting more robust ideologies while adapting flexibly to diverse political contexts and agendas.

5.2 Structural crisis of capitalism and the rise of national-populism

The resurgence of nationalist-populist discourses and movements in recent decades is closely linked to structural transformations of an economic and social nature that began to intensify in the 1970s. The 2008 global financial crisis, triggered by the U.S. financial system, not only profoundly affected global economies but also worsened the vulnerability of historically marginalized sectors such as the working and middle classes. Beyond its immediate impact, this crisis revealed structural failures in the international economic system, including poor practices in the financial sector and weaknesses in regulatory mechanisms (Rayran Cortés, 2018).

The 2008 financial collapse was the outcome of long-term processes tied to the stagnation of the real economy, particularly in the United States. Theorists such as Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, and Harry Magdoff had already warned, as early as the mid-20th century, about the tendency toward rigidity and stagnation in monopolistic capitalism. According to these authors, periods of prosperity were the result of historically exceptional circumstances, while structural stagnation is an inherent characteristic of mature capitalist systems (Foster and Magdoff, 2009).

In contrast to the orthodox view that sees rapid growth as the natural state of capitalism and recessions as temporary, self-correcting events, the critical tradition represented by Sweezy

and Magdoff argues that prolonged stagnation is a persistent manifestation of the system’s internal limitations. From this perspective, economic slowdown is not a cyclical anomaly, but a structural expression of capital’s difficulty in sustaining long-term accumulation rates (Sweezy and Magdoff, 1987).

This dynamic is reflected in historical patterns of U.S. real GDP growth. Throughout the 20th century, distinct cycles can be identified: a sharp contraction during the Great Depression of the 1930s, followed by a boom driven by World War II and the so-called “Golden Age” between the 1950s and 1970s. However, from the 1980s onward, growth rates began to decline steadily, solidifying a trend of low economic dynamism that persists to this day.

Schultz (2019) argues that Donald Trump adopted a foreign policy approach that was more nationalist, isolationist, unilateral, bilateral, and anti-immigration than that of any of his recent predecessors. Under Trump’s leadership, relations with the European Union shifted toward direct political interactions with individual European nations. These changes included redefining the United States’ central role in NATO, strengthening ties between Trump and Putin—perceived as a threat to security along the EU’s eastern borders—Trump’s support for Brexit, his encouragement of Europe’s far-right movements and their leaders, and the imposition of tariffs on European goods by his administration.

Within the framework of the rise of national-populism in the United States, it is crucial to understand the approach taken by the Trump administration toward the global economy. The trade war between the United States and China initiated in 2018, along with the tariff policies of the Trump administration, illustrate the increasing tendency to reassert state sovereignty in the face of economic integration and multilateralism. Trump imposed massive tariffs on Chinese imports, arguing the need to protect American workers and companies from what he considered unfair practices, promoting a nationalist economic policy that challenged existing international agreements under the World Trade Organization (WTO).

This approach underscores a central contradiction in the international system: on one hand, global economic interdependence requires cooperation and openness; on the other hand, the populism that has surged in countries like the United States revives the notion of the state as the supreme actor that must put its interests first, without compromising its autonomy in multilateral agreements. The tariff war between the United States and China thus becomes a clear example of the tension between national logics and supranational structures, raising fundamental questions about the real possibility of reconciling state sovereignty with a more inclusive and coordinated international order.

A further illustrative example can be found in Donald Trump’s inaugural address, during which he explicitly criticized supranational institutions and international agreements, arguing that they undermined United States autonomy (Schultz, 2019; U.S. Department of State, 2025). Prioritizing the primacy of national sovereignty, Trump rejected the authority of multilateral bodies and subsequently withdrew the United States from several international commitments—including the Paris Agreement on climate change, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the World Health Organization—which he contended restricted the nation’s capacity for independent policymaking (US Department

of State, 2025; Krasner, 1999). Within this context, both Brexit and Trump's electoral victory can be viewed as emblematic of a broader global resurgence of populism and nationalism, which reflects growing skepticism toward multilateral cooperation and a corresponding reassertion of state-centered political priorities (Panizza, 2009; Rayran Cortés, 2018).

6 Conclusion: toward a post-sovereign global order

Throughout this paper, we have offered a critical reading of state sovereignty as a foundational principle of the modern international order. Far from guaranteeing stability or legitimate representation of peoples, sovereignty has historically functioned as a mechanism of exclusion, forced homogenization, and the defense of particular interests. Born out of religious conflict and reinforced by the rise of nationalisms, this structure has shown itself to be incapable of adapting to the challenges of an interdependent and plural world.

Instead, we have argued for the need to move toward supranational forms of organization that acknowledge and value the internal diversity of peoples, without subordinating them to a hegemonic national identity. The European Union, with all its tensions and limitations, serves as an empirical example of this possibility, having developed an institutional structure capable of combining transnational citizenship, shared competencies, and plural representation.

Sovereignty, understood as the absolute authority of the nation-state, should not be regarded as an intangible or perpetual principle. On the contrary, it must be reevaluated in light of universal human rights, growing global interdependencies, and the legitimate demands for cultural and political recognition by historically marginalized groups.

Far from constituting a threat, the progressive transcendence of state sovereignty in favor of more inclusive forms of regional governance could represent a step forward in the construction of a more just, equitable, and sustainable international order. The recent resurgence of nationalist-populist movements, most notably in the United States and Europe, confirms that the sovereign state continues to serve as a symbolic refuge in times of perceived crisis. Yet, rather than offering effective solutions to global challenges, this return to sovereigntist rhetoric further exposes the limitations of the current international system.

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These movements capitalize on social and economic insecurities while obstructing collective responses that require supranational cooperation, thereby reinforcing the urgent need for post-sovereign political imagination. Above all, this entails rethinking political legitimacy from a human-centered perspective, where the state is a means to collective wellbeing, not an end in itself, and where the plurality of identities is no longer seen as an obstacle, but as the very foundation of peaceful coexistence among peoples.

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