

The Concept of Globalization and Its Impact on Politics and Culture in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

Globalization refers to an accelerated process of interaction and interconnection among societies and states across political, economic, and cultural domains, driven by technological advancement, the communications revolution, and market liberalization. In the twenty-first century, globalization has contributed to reshaping the structure of the international system by relatively diminishing the traditional role of the nation-state and enhancing the influence of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations and international organizations. This transformation has had profound implications for political decision-making processes and national sovereignty. On the cultural level, globalization has intensified cultural exchange among peoples and facilitated the spread of shared global cultural patterns. At the same time, it has raised growing concerns about the erosion of national identities and the threat to local cultural specificities. Moreover, globalization has generated a complex interaction between local and global cultures, manifested in simultaneous processes of cultural adaptation and resistance. Therefore, globalization represents a multidimensional phenomenon with both positive and negative consequences, making its study essential for understanding political and cultural transformations in the contemporary world.

Keywords: *Globalization, International System, Cultural Identity, Nation-State.*

Introduction

Since the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the world has witnessed profound structural transformations in economics, politics, and culture, linked to the explosion of the communications and information revolution, the liberalization of capital flows, and the intensification of the movement of people and ideas across borders. These transformations have been formulated under the overarching concept of "globalization," which is no longer merely an economic phenomenon or a passing wave, but has become a comprehensive framework that is reshaping power structures, the boundaries of the nation-state, and the cultural and identity-based imaginations of individuals and societies.

Globalization, according to David Heald and his colleagues, is "a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions in terms of scope, intensity, speed, and impact, generating flows and interactions that transcend regions and continents." This definition highlights the structural nature of globalization as a reshaping of the global sphere, not merely an expansion of trade or communication. Manfred Steger further argues that globalization manifests itself in four fundamental dimensions: economic, political, cultural, and environmental, which intertwine and produce new patterns of interdependence and interconnectedness among societies.

In the Arab context, and from the perspective of historical studies, globalization has acquired additional connotations. In Arab consciousness, it has become associated with terms like "Americanization," "imperial hegemony," and "cultural invasion." It has also appeared in the writings of several Arab thinkers—such as Burhan Ghalioun, Samir Amin, and Turki al-Hamad—as a direct challenge to Arab cultural identity and to the historical capacity of Arab societies to reproduce

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themselves in a world dominated by global market forces, transnational corporations, and international financial institutions.

The importance of globalization is not limited to its economic dimension; it extends to redefining politics and culture in the 21st century. The nation-state is undergoing transformations in its concept of sovereignty and its traditional functions under the pressure of international organizations, free trade agreements, and non-governmental actors such as corporations, NGOs, and transnational networks. Conversely, national culture is exposed to a deluge of images, symbols, and discourses arriving via satellite television, digital platforms, and social media networks, generating tensions between universalism and local particularities, and between "the culture of globalization" and "the globalization of culture," as Burhan Ghalioun puts it.

Hence, this historical-analytical study examines the concept of globalization and its effects on politics and culture in the twenty-first century, focusing on Arab and international theoretical contributions, and exploring the repercussions of this phenomenon on the structure of the global political system and on cultural identities in the societies of the South, including the Arab world.

Second: The Importance of the Research

The theoretical significance of this research lies in its attempt to establish the concept of globalization from a historical-analytical perspective, by tracing the development of the concept in Western literature (Hilde, Castells, Giddens, and Peters) and in Arab thought (Ghalion, Amin, and Al-Hamad). Through this comparative approach, the research bridges the gap between global theoretical approaches and Arab critical perspectives that have addressed globalization and its complexities. Its importance is further demonstrated by its systematic linking of the political and cultural dimensions of globalization, whereas many previous Arab studies have focused on one to the exclusion of the other, or have addressed globalization exclusively as an economic phenomenon, thus hindering a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing transformations. Therefore, the research provides a conceptual framework that assists researchers in history and political science in analyzing the interactions between globalization, the nation-state, and cultural identity, which are central themes in 21st-century studies.

The practical significance of this research stems from its in-depth analysis of how globalization impacts the instruments of power and sovereignty, through the expanding roles of international organizations, multinational corporations, and transnational media—elements that now directly influence national policies. Furthermore, the research reveals the nature of the cultural transformations affecting Arab society, particularly its youth, amidst the influx of digital images, symbols, and texts, and the accompanying conflicts surrounding identity, belonging, and values. In addition, the research findings can contribute to the development of educational and cultural policies that are more aware of the risks and opportunities of globalization, thereby fostering a capacity for controlled openness while simultaneously preserving the distinctive characteristics of national identity.

The significance of this research for the field of history stems from its belonging to the realm of contemporary history. It focuses on the major transformations the world witnessed at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, enabling historians to understand globalization as an ongoing historical event rather than a mere transient phenomenon. Furthermore, the research connects the historical contexts that contributed to the formation of globalization—such as colonialism, the Industrial Revolution, the Cold War, and the Digital Revolution—with its current form. This aligns with the nature of historical studies, which examine phenomena within the framework of their temporal development and structural transformations across different eras.

Third: Research Objectives

This research aims to achieve a set of main objectives, the most important of which are:

1. To establish the concept of globalization and explain its historical roots and semantic development, while presenting its most prominent definitions in Arabic and English literature.
2. Analyzing the main dimensions of globalization (political, economic, cultural, and technological) and demonstrating their overlap in shaping the features of the twenty-first century.
3. Studying the political effects of globalization on the nation-state, national sovereignty, forms of government, democracy, and human rights.

4. Exploring the cultural effects of globalization on identity, language, values, and symbolic patterns in contemporary societies, with a focus on the Arab world.

5. To provide a balanced critical reading that highlights the opportunities that globalization offers for modernizing societies, versus the risks that threaten political independence and cultural diversity.

Fourth: The Research Problem

This study stems from a central problem that can be formulated as follows:

To what extent has globalization contributed to reshaping politics and culture in the twenty-first century, affecting the concept of sovereignty and the nation-state on the one hand, and local cultural identities – especially in the Arab world – on the other?

This central problem gives rise to a number of sub-questions, including:

1. What are the historical roots of the concept of globalization? How did it evolve from purely economic concepts to a comprehensive structure encompassing politics and culture?

2. What are the most important political dimensions of globalization? How do these dimensions affect the concept of sovereignty, the functions of the nation-state, and power relations within the international system?

3. How does globalization affect culture, identity, language, and values in Arab societies? What is the nature of the interactions between the "global" and the "local" in this context?

4. Does globalization lead to cultural unification (Cultural adaptation/assimilation) or to hybridization and a plurality of identities and cultures, as some contemporary theories suggest?

Fifth: Research Hypothesis

Based on the previous problem, this research hypothesizes the following:

Globalization in the twenty-first century represents a structural framework that reshapes politics and culture together; on the one hand, it undermines some of the functions of the traditional nation-state and creates new forms of transnational governance, and on the other hand, it produces a state of tension between the tendency towards universal cultural homogenization and the processes of hybridization and resistance undertaken by local cultures, especially in the Arab world.

This hypothesis includes several sub-elements, among them:

1. Political globalization weakens the state's monopoly on decision-making, in favor of international actors and transnational networks.

2. Cultural globalization does not lead to the complete "dissolution" of local cultures, but rather to processes of interaction and hybridization that produce new hybrid identities, although the risk of cultural marginalization remains.

3. Societies lacking conscious cultural and educational policies become more vulnerable to the negative impact of globalization in both the political and cultural spheres.

Sixth: Research Methodology

The research employs a composite methodology that combines:

1. The Historical Method: This involves tracing the historical origins of globalization and analyzing the stages it has undergone since the beginnings of the modern global economy, through the post-Cold War period, and up to the digital revolution and the contemporary networked world.

2. The Descriptive-Analytical Method: This describes the phenomenon as presented in specialized literature, then analyzes and critiques its political and cultural implications based on the experience of the Arab world.

3. The Comparative Method: This involves comparing some Western theses on globalization (Giddens, Castells, Heald, Peters, Peters) with their Arab counterparts (Ghalion, Amin, Al-Hamad, Leclercq in his Arabic translation) and identifying points of convergence and divergence.

As for sources, the research relies on:

- Arabic books specializing in globalization, culture, and politics.

- Arabic translations of international works on cultural globalization.
- Key English references in the field of globalization studies.
- Scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals available online, particularly in Arabic databases and academic websites.

Seventh: Research Plan

The research – after the introduction and methodological framework – consists of two main sections, each section having two requirements, as follows:

Section One: The Conceptual and Historical Framework of Globalization

Subsection One: The Historical Roots of the Concept of Globalization and the Evolution of its Meanings.

Subsection Two: Dimensions and Manifestations of Globalization in the 21st Century.

Section Two: The Political and Cultural Effects of Globalization in the 21st Century.

Subsection One: Globalization and Politics: The Nation-State, Sovereignty, and Democracy.

The second requirement: Globalization and Culture: Identity, Digital Communication, and Cultural Conflict/Hybridization.

Below, I present the first section, with its two subsections, in an expanded form. You may later request that I expand or modify the second section as needed.

Section One: The Conceptual and Historical Framework of Globalization

Subsection One: The Historical Roots of the Concept of Globalization and the Evolution of its Meanings

Although the term “globalization” only became widespread in the literature in the last decades of the twentieth century, the roots of the phenomenon are much older. A number of researchers – such as David Heald and others – link the beginnings of globalization to the formation of the global capitalist economy, European colonial expansion, and the development of transcontinental trade and transportation networks since the sixteenth century, with this trend continuing through the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. ()

However, the use of the term in its current form is linked to post-Cold War transformations, as the world witnessed the decline of bipolarity, the rise of neoliberal discourse, and the intensification of capital flows and international trade, along with a revolution in communication and information technologies. At this stage, the term “globalization” took its place in academic and media discourse, expressing the increasing interdependence between countries and societies, and the emergence of complex networks of economic, political, and cultural interconnectedness. ()

In Arab thought, Burhan Ghalioun and Samir Amin’s book “The Culture of Globalization and the Globalization of Culture” and Samir Amin’s writings on “Globalized Capitalism” show that awareness of globalization was not neutral or celebratory, but rather imbued with the experience of dependency and neo-colonialism, as many writers view globalization as a new face of imperialist hegemony, in which major capitalist centers control the destinies of the Third World through economic, cultural and media tools. ()

Some contemporary Arab studies argue that the concept of globalization is “multi-connoted”; it is sometimes used as a synonym for “Americanization,” sometimes to describe the integration of the world politically, economically and culturally into a single system, and sometimes as a description of a new historical stage in which “distances shrink and borders are redefined” under the pressure of the digital revolution and communication networks. ()

On the other hand, Anthony Giddens asserts in his book *Runaway World* that globalization is not a one-way process, but rather a set of intertwined transformations that “link the everyday experiences of individuals with distant events.” Decisions in the financial markets of New York or Tokyo can directly affect the lives of people in small towns in the South, and patterns of consumption, fashion, and tastes are transmitted through media networks almost instantaneously. ()

Thus, the concept of globalization can be said to have passed through three main stages:

1. The early stages: linked to the emergence of the global capitalist economy and the expansion of European colonialism.

2. The theoretical crystallization stage in the last decades of the 20th century, with the work of Heald, Castells, and Giddens, and the accompanying extensive discussions about the "end of the nation-state," the "network society," and the "world without borders."

3. The digital globalization stage at the beginning of the 21st century, where cyberspace and social media networks became an essential part of the public sphere, and culture and politics began to be practiced in hybrid spaces that combined the real and the virtual.

Subsection Two: Dimensions and manifestations of globalization in the 21st century.

Most literature agrees that globalization encompasses a range of interconnected dimensions, most notably the economic, political, cultural, and technological dimensions, with some researchers adding environmental and security dimensions. However, this study, by virtue of its subject matter, focuses on the interrelationship between the political and cultural dimensions and the other dimensions.

1. The economic dimension

This is manifested in the expansion of international trade, the liberalization of markets, the growth of multinational corporations, and the increasing role of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These are phenomena that Heald and his colleagues analyzed extensively in the book *Global Transformations*. () This dimension cannot be separated from politics and culture, as it imposes a liberal capitalist economic pattern that affects national policies, consumption patterns, and values.

2. The Political Dimension

This relates to changing patterns of power exercise and the rise of what can be termed "global governance," where the roles of the United Nations, regional organizations, international courts, and transnational non-governmental organizations expand, thus limiting the nation-state's monopoly on political action. Theories such as David Heald's "cosmopolitan democracy" also emerge, advocating for extending the principles of accountability and participation to the global level.()

3. The Cultural Dimension

This is evident in the spread of a global consumer culture, the dominance of certain languages (especially English), the popularization of specific styles of music, cinema, and fashion, and the intensification of cultural exchanges through digital media. Here, the writings of Gérard Leclercq, Paul Huber, and Jan Niederwin-Peters distinguish between three approaches: globalization as "cultural homogenization," a "clash of civilizations," or a "cultural hybridization" that produces a new global mix.()

4. The Technological-Communicative Dimension

The digital revolution is one of the main drivers of globalization. The internet, smartphones, social media platforms, and cross-border news channels have all contributed to accelerating the movement of information, images, and messages, to the point that the world is now described as a "global village." Manuel Castells analyzed these transformations within the framework of the concept of the "network society," which is based on the flow of information in immaterial spaces that transcend traditional geographical boundaries. ()

In the 21st century, these dimensions are intensifying in a range of practical manifestations, including:

- The increasing number of international and regional organizations, and the growing importance of international law and human rights principles in limiting the absolute sovereignty of states.
- The growing influence of major digital companies (social media platforms and search engines), as influential cultural and political actors, not merely economic ones.
- The transformation of the digital space into an arena for political and cultural conflicts (media wars, disinformation, digital election campaigns).
- The emergence of new forms of transnational identities, whether based on religion, ethnicity, shared interests, or even virtual affiliations.

Section Two: The Political and Cultural Effects of Globalization in the 21st Century

Globalization represents one of the most prominent structural transformations that have altered the landscape of politics and culture in the 21st century. It has reshaped the relationship between states and societies and imposed new concepts of sovereignty, power, identity, communication, and cultural interaction. This section builds upon the preceding theoretical framework but focuses on the practical effects of globalization in the political and cultural spheres, drawing on contemporary Arabic and Western literature.

Subsection One: Globalization and Politics – The Nation-State, Sovereignty, and Democracy

First: Globalization and the Crisis of Sovereignty

Since the 17th century, sovereignty has been the cornerstone of the Westphalian nation-state, where the state enjoyed absolute power within its borders and complete independence from others. However, as David Heald () points out, globalization has eroded this model by intensifying cross-border flows: capital, information, multinational corporations, international organizations, and global social movements. As a result, the state is no longer able to fully control its economy, its media, its information space, or even its legal system. International financial institutions exert control over the policies of developing countries, human rights organizations monitor government performance, and information disseminates beyond the state's traditional control. ()

In the Arab context, Ahmed Youssef Ahmed's writings indicate that Arab sovereignty has become "incomplete sovereignty" due to economic and communication globalization, which has weakened the state's ability to manage its economy and media in traditional ways (), and therefore, Arab states face the challenge of reconciling the requirements of economic openness with the requirements of preserving the independence of national decision-making.

Second: Changing State Functions and the Role of New Actors

In his analysis of the "network society," () Manuel Castells argues that the state is no longer the sole actor in politics, but rather power is distributed among:

- International organizations
- Transnational corporations
- Non-governmental actors
- Digital platforms
- Global social movements

This plurality has made political power more complex, leading to the transfer of parts of national decision-making to supranational levels (international governance). The work of Ismail Sabri Muqallad () demonstrates that this shift compels states to reformulate their policies in response to external variables that exceed their national capabilities.

Third: Globalization and Democracy – Political Openness or Economic Domination?

Globalization as a Factor in Promoting Democracy

Some theorists – such as Anthony Giddens () argue that globalization has contributed to the spread of democratic values and human rights through the flow of information and increased public awareness. Social media has provided a wide margin for dissent and social activism, and has offered channels for exposing corruption and mobilizing protest movements, as has been seen in a number of Arab countries.

Globalization as a Factor Weakening Democracy

In contrast, Samir Amin () presents a critical perspective asserting that globalization is used as a tool to subjugate developing countries through international financial institutions, thus limiting their ability to formulate policies that serve their people. Furthermore, the concentration of wealth in the hands of large corporations weakens political participation and places economic decision-making at the supranational level.

Fourth: Globalization and Security – From National Security to Human Security

Recent literature – such as that of Morsi Attia() indicates that the concept of security has expanded beyond military threats to include:

- Information security
- Health security (as in the Coronavirus pandemic)
- Environmental security
- Food security
- Transnational terrorism

These risks present the state with new challenges that cannot be confronted with traditional tools alone, but require international cooperation and the development of flexible domestic policies that are appropriate to the nature of the emerging threats.

Fifth: The Arab State in the Face of Political Globalization

Arab states face a number of specific challenges, the most important of which are:

1. Weak democratic structures, resulting in uneven political openness.
2. Economic dependence on foreign powers, which undermines political independence.
3. Security vulnerabilities due to terrorism and organized crime.
4. Weak knowledge production, leading to a consumer-driven rather than a productive engagement with globalization.

Nevertheless, globalization has presented opportunities for Arab states to modernize their legislative and technological infrastructure, open up to global markets, and leverage the digital revolution in the economy, education, and administration.

Subsection Two: Globalization and culture – identity, digital media, and cultural hybridization

First: Globalization and the erosion of the national cultural monopoly

Until the end of the 20th century, culture was framed by national institutions such as education and official media. However, as Gérard Leclercq() explains, globalization led to:

- The collapse of the state monopoly on media
- The proliferation of satellite channels
- The dominance of large media corporations
- The transfer of culture to the digital sphere
- The borderless flow of symbols and images

And young people began consuming global content at an astonishing rate, while the influence of traditional local culture declined.

Second: Cultural Identity Between Particularity and Universality

The writings of Abdel Wahab El-Messiri() suggest that globalization threatens local identities by imposing a Western cultural model based on individualism, consumerism, and rapid modernization.

However, another perspective-led by Jean Niederwin-Peters() argues that globalization does not impose a single culture, but rather creates a space for interaction, resulting in cultural hybridization that blends the local and the global.

Evidence of this can be seen in the emergence of contemporary Arabic music, fashion trends that draw on traditional symbols, and Arabic digital platforms that compete globally in content.

Third: The Digital Revolution and the Transformation of Culture

Paul Hooper() argues that culture has become distinctly digital, where:

- Individuals participate in the production of culture

- Ideas travel at breakneck speed
- New identities are formed through cyberspace
- The boundaries between the cultural and the political are blurring

Culture has also shifted from "text" to "image," weakening written culture in favor of a faster and more influential visual-digital culture.

Fourth: Clash of Cultures or Cultural Hybridization?

Cultural Conflict Theory

John Tomlinson() argues that globalization leads to a conflict between a dominant cultural center (the West) and peripheries seeking to preserve their identity.

Cultural Hybridization Theory

Arjun Appadurai() argues that globalization produces "cultural flows" that interact to create hybrid cultures, rather than a zero-sum conflict.

Fifth: Arab Culture in the Age of Globalization

Challenges

- Decline in Books and Reading
- Dominance of Foreign Content
- Weakness of Local Cultural Industries
- Rise of the Consumer Model
- Profound Impact of Social Media

Opportunities

- Global Spread of Arabic Content Across Platforms
- Emergence of a New Digital Arab Identity
- Revival of Heritage Through Modern Media
- Expansion of the Creative Industries Market

Thus, Arab culture is not a victim of globalization, but rather an active agent capable of adapting and innovating, provided there are supportive cultural policies and development of digital and creative capabilities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that globalization is not merely an economic phenomenon or a passing phase, but rather a comprehensive structural transformation that has reshaped the world in the 21st century on political, economic, cultural, communication, and identity levels. Globalization has undermined several traditional concepts, most notably the nation-state and absolute sovereignty, as political, economic, and cultural decisions are now influenced by interconnected networks of international actors, multinational corporations, financial institutions, social movements, and digital platforms. Simultaneously, globalization has impacted culture and identity through the flow of images, symbols, and values, the emergence of a decentralized media landscape, and a rising digital culture that transcends national borders and reshapes patterns of human interaction.

Despite the concerns raised by globalization, particularly in the Arab world, regarding the erosion of identity, the weakening of state institutions, and the widening digital divide, it has also opened new opportunities for cultural creativity, modernization of public administration, development of education, enhanced political participation, and greater cultural openness. Therefore, globalization is not a unidirectional project, but rather an interactive process whose impact is determined by the ability of states and societies to adapt and balance the demands of openness with the protection of national identities.

In light of the analysis presented by the research, a number of conclusions and recommendations can be formulated, which contribute to a deeper understanding of globalization and to building policies capable of dealing with its challenges.

First: Inference

1. Globalization has redefined the concept of sovereignty; the nation-state is no longer the sole entity controlling decision-making, but rather sovereignty is distributed among international, regional, and digital actors.

2. The global political sphere has become multi-layered, through global governance, multinational corporations, and non-governmental organizations, making national politics part of a larger system.

3. National culture has lost its traditional monopoly due to the influx of global content and the dominance of major media corporations, leading to a diminished role for traditional cultural institutions.

4. Digital culture has become the most prominent factor in shaping consciousness, especially among young people, as individuals have transformed from recipients to producers of meaning and symbols.

5. Cultural globalization is not merely a process of conflict, but rather a process of interaction and cultural hybridization that creates new forms of hybrid identities combining the local and the global.

6. Arab countries face particular challenges stemming from weak cultural industries, economic dependence on foreign countries, security vulnerabilities, and the digital divide.

7. Despite these challenges, globalization offers significant opportunities for Arab countries in the fields of education, e-governance, global communication, and the production of a contemporary Arab digital culture.

8. The absence of a unified Arab cultural and political strategy makes dealing with globalization reactive rather than proactive, increasing dependency and weakening the ability to capitalize on available opportunities.

9. The essence of globalization is based on knowledge and information. Therefore, countries that invest in education and technology will be best equipped to counter its negative effects.

10. Arab identity possesses high adaptability despite pressures and can integrate positively into the global environment, provided there is a clearly defined cultural project.

Second: Recommendations

1. Strengthen smart national sovereignty by adopting policies based on controlled openness, developing international negotiation tools, and reducing economic dependence.

2. Develop a digital governance infrastructure to bridge the gap between the state and society, and modernize public administration to meet contemporary demands.

3. Enhance transparency and accountability, and integrate technology into anti-corruption mechanisms to improve the state's ability to engage with international standards.

4. Build regional Arab partnerships in cybersecurity, digital policies, and e-learning to address cross-border threats.

5. Strengthen local political institutions to enhance the state's capacity to adapt to global transformations rather than succumb to them.

6. Develop a unified Arab cultural strategy that focuses on protecting identity, promoting diversity, and fostering openness to others without assimilation.

7. Invest in creative and cultural industries (cinema, music, e-publishing, digital games), as they represent the primary soft power of our time.

8. Support Arabic digital content through governmental and private programs to improve the quality of local production and increase its competitiveness. 9. Improving the quality of education, particularly in languages, technology, and critical thinking, to strengthen the resilience of Arab identity against the negative impacts of globalization.

10. Reviving Arab cultural heritage through a comprehensive digital project that documents and presents it in modern formats that resonate with new generations.
11. Encouraging Arab research on globalization to address the clear weakness in local literature compared to Western literature.
12. Providing open Arabic databases that facilitate access to knowledge and reduce complete dependence on foreign sources.
13. Establishing specialized research centers to monitor global trends, analyze their impact on the Arab region, and inform political and cultural decision-making.

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