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Hyperglobalism is a label used for diverse claims that globalization has decisively undermined the nation-state as a container and regulator of economic, cultural, and political affairs. Hyperglobalists are held to believe that global markets and technological advances—particularly in transport and communications sectors—have created globalized flows of such a volume and velocity that socio-economic, cultural entities and patterns of power relations have been radically reconfigured as a result, not just quantitatively but also qualitatively. Some suggest that this will ultimately lead to the emergence of a singular “borderless” world, while others focus on the reconfiguration of new borders along nonterritorial lines, e.g., global networks, global cities, regional states, or global class formations. Hyperglobalist analyses have pointed to new strategies in economic and business management, new political institutions, and, for some, a revised framework of thinking for a global age that differs in fundamental respects from that of modernity.

As a term, hyperglobalism has been coined not by those it labels, but by other positions in the so-called great globalization debate. A skeptical view challenged what it saw as extreme globalists peddling a globalization myth. A third “transformationist” position advanced by David Held and colleagues then provided a now widely cited taxonomy of positions in the debate identifying three main idealized positions: hyperglobal, skeptic, and transformationist. According to this now standard typology, hyperglobal must be understood not just as a solitary position but as one pole in an ongoing public and academic debate. Skeptics defined themselves in opposition to hyperglobalism, which they claimed inflated the significance of global flows and underestimated the resilience of the state as a political force capable of regulating and moderating economic and political life. They pointed to the continued importance of (national) borders in economics, finance, and politics, and they argued that the worldwide interdependence of today is rivaled or even surpassed by earlier periods when international commerce and travel and organization thrived, such as the golden age of liberal trade, empire, and worldwide alliances that existed prior to World War I. Hyperglobalism is “explained” either in terms of superficial or historically deficient analysis or (for left-leaning critics) as an ideological smoke screen for corporate interests in deregulation of trade and privatization. The third position labeled “transformationist” accepts the idea that globalization has transformed the way the state can and should operate. Other actors such as nongovernmental organizations, private and commercial associations, and clandestine networks such as international terrorists and criminal networks have joined states on the world stage, as have a network of international institutions and norms in a system of multilevel governance. But the hyperglobalist idea of a borderless world, transformationists claim, is false and obscures the continued need and ability of (democratic) states and societies to manage globalization, albeit not as classic sovereign states. New forms of state power, global stratification, and systems for keeping order is considered to be a more relevant focus of study than hyperglobalist “one-worldism.”

Significant differences persist, however, between positions grouped by the hyperglobalist label. In particular, hyperglobalists differ as to the main drivers and outcomes of globalization. A strong focus on the economic aspects of globalization compares with other less economic positions. Those inspired by otherwise neoclassical economic perspectives, “global liberals,” identify the spread and increased penetration of global markets and consider this a bottom-up, technology-driven force that breaks down old boundaries, traditions, and socioeconomic structures, including national boundaries and state regulations, opening up avenues of opportunity and wealth. In the eyes of some global liberals, economic globalization leads to more freedom and democracy as well as to increased prosperity. In contrast, a critical historical materialist position within hyperglobalism is similarly focused on economic

globalization but concerned about what it views as a deliberate attempt to liberalize domestic and international economies, redistributing power and wealth in the interests of a certain segment of society. Rather than being a quasi-evolutionary process that via innovation and the invisible hand of the free market serves the global common good, critics consider globalization a political project pushed by interest groups that privilege certain global constituencies, disempowering local communities, marginalizing alternative forms of social organization, and suppressing the plurality of cultures and modes of thinking. In other words, they agree that globalization is a reality, but they disagree on what the consequences are.

A third strand of thinking also sometimes included under the hyperglobal label makes the much less economic argument that globality represents a revolution not only in socioeconomic structures but also in the mind-set and forms of knowledge associated with modernity itself. Distinctive to this position is the idea that the growing tendency to understand and communicate the globe as a shared singular reality, with inbuilt limits and risks, is shaking not just the paradigmatic status given to the closed political community of the nation-state but also a range of fundamental modern beliefs in expansion, growth, cumulative progress, and in some ways hierarchy as an organizational form. The motor of this change is more broadly macro-sociological, determined not just by economic but also by ideational and epochal shifts and the rise of social forms like networks. The disjunction between global discourse and networked society, on the one hand, and hierarchical national institutions, on the other hand, threatens the stability of existing order, while the path to new ones is growing but remains obscured because outdated modern mentalities are slower to change. The global age thesis, network theory, and writing on the prospects for a world society, global state, or global polity attempt in various ways to deal with the problem of social and political structure in a globalized world, all with the hyperglobalist premise that the nation-state order of hierarchy wedded to territoriality is fundamentally and irredeemably transformed.

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Further Readings

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