



## The Future of Nation-States: Analyzing Evolving Challenges in a Globalized World

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**Abstract:** This research delves into the future of the nation-state by exploring the ideas of Ernest Renan and Clifford Geertz, especially concerning developing, post-colonial countries. The paper deploys a textual analysis approach based on different studies. Renan's 1882 essay, "What is a Nation?" offers a foundational idea and portrays the nation-state as a construct rooted in shared cultural heritage and collective history, rather than something inherent or eternal. His vision was of European nation-states built on democratic values and a diverse cultural fabric, shaped by the shared experiences and aspirations of their people. In contrast, Geertz, writing much later, critiques the applicability of Western nation-state models to post-colonial societies. Through his ethnographic work in countries like Indonesia and Morocco, he illustrates the challenges these states face in trying to align with Western concepts of sovereignty. Geertz argues that the idea of a centralized, cohesive sovereignty often does not fit these regions, where internal divisions and external pressures make national unity difficult to achieve. The paper suggests that Geertz's observations about post-colonial nation-states are particularly relevant today, especially for developing countries. These nations frequently grapple with compromised sovereignty due to external influences like international aid and global environmental policies. All of which disproportionately affect them despite their limited role in global issues such as climate change. Additionally, internal conflicts, whether ethnic, religious, or political, further strain the integrity of the nation-state in these areas. By examining aspects like the public sphere, international law, development, and social movements, the paper assesses how vulnerable the nation-state has become in a globalized world. It concludes that the future of the nation-state, particularly in the developing world, is increasingly uncertain as both internal and external challenges continue to mount.

**Keywords:** Future of Nation State, Globalization, Developing World, Evolution of Nation State,

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### 1. Introduction

Ernest Renan, in 1882, came up with an essay "What is a Nation?". The Revolutions of 1848 spurred a series of political upheavals throughout Europe which failed to unify the German-speaking states. This influenced Renan's work about the idea of "nations". Renan was interested in questions such as; what is a nation? Furthermore, Renan's notion of "nation-state" was also influenced by the Treaty of Westphalia and the time when France was reeling from the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. He defined certain characteristics of the nation and those of the state. He saw European state based on shared cultural heritage and as a way to reconcile the conflicting national interests that gave rise to wars in Europe. His vision was that of a democratic and culturally diverse/heterogeneous Europe. He claimed that a nation is an aggregation of men with moral conscience and it is not eternal rather has a beginning and an end. Furthermore, nation-state is not inherently natural rather it emerged as a result of common *past* full of sacrifices and glories of its people in addition to their will to continue them in the *present* (Renan,

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Geertz presented his idea of post-colonial state more than a century later to that of Renan's depiction of modern nation-state. He focused on heterogeneous environment in post-colonial, non-Western states and challenged the idea of sovereignty as a necessary condition for the working of such state (Geertz, 2004). His work involved an ethnographic approach discussing several countries that had been decolonized; for instance, Indonesia and Morocco. He observed these states and gathered the idea that the governmental apparatus in those societies did not really fit into Western idea of nation-state. In Geertz view, decolonization did not necessarily mean democratization. According to him, unlike Western, democratic states; compacted sovereignty\_ centered and inclusive\_ was hard to locate in post-colonial states. His attempt was to broaden the definition of state beyond the Western ideals of sovereignty in the post-colonial states. In this way, he questioned the applicability of Western political models to other parts of the world.

In the developing countries, Geertz' depiction of nation-state sounds more plausible because of two reasons. Firstly, these countries are not sovereign in the real sense of the word as international organizations and developed powers continue to impinge on the national sovereignty of these countries in the form of aid, trade policies, global warming implications, and imperial practices; as a result of globalization and transnational factors. Aid is provided to developing nations with a set of conditions which are to be fulfilled by the receiving country and which give more say to external powers in deciding the fate of these nations. Just like this, developed countries are the ones which have greater contributions in increased carbon emissions but the price of exacerbating global warming is being paid by the developing world which looks helpless. Furthermore, through the neoliberal economic reform in the periphery, the states and civil societies of the First World essentially do not care about humanity outside their populations and derive a benefit for their own population at the expense of those outside, as Foucault interprets it.

Secondly, there are internal schisms in these countries because of the presence of heterogeneous groups which aggravates the levels of sub-nationalism and tends to divide people rather than assemble them into a single entity to properly constitute a nation-state. The governments and non-state actors along with the political elites in these countries, tend to serve their own interests at the expense of common people who are deprived of basic resources and rights. This further leads to the creation of ethnic or religious groups from minorities who challenge the writ of the state.

Because of these reasons, it can be concluded that the condition of nation-state in the developing, post-colonial world is in a state of crisis and as Renan says, the existence of a nation-state is not eternal. To further support this narrative, excerpts from different readings and case studies are discussed below.

**Public Sphere:** the way people create the sense of a political society in the public sphere (Chatterjee)

In the "Politics of the Governed", Chatterjee (2004) starts off by describing the characteristics of a community or a public sphere, which involve shared or imagined kinship, territorial limits of the colony, and moral attributes. He further asserts that in order to effectively make its claim in political society, a population group produced by governmentality must be invested with the moral content of community.

Chatterjee gives the example of rail colony and elaborates how residents of a colony *organize* to get themselves identified as a distinct population group that is to receive the benefits of a certain governmental program. Different population groups\_ refugees, laborers, landless people\_ define their claims on the demographic categories of governmentality (Chatterjee, 2004). However, these claims are successful only if a certain population group can *mobilize support* for effective implementation of the governmental policy in its favor; that success too is temporary nevertheless. Alongside this, people in the public sphere also resort to Welfare Association to get their disputes settled and to approach government.

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People in such communities have formally recognized *political representatives* who can mediate on their behalf in order to make themselves heard (Chatterjee, 2004). For instance, the key figure in the successful mobilization of rail colony into the arena of political society was a school Master. But, rural poor do not opt to mobilization as members of civil society; instead in order to direct benefits towards them, they need to apply the right pressure in the governmental machinery. They must succeed in *mobilizing groups* to produce local political consensus which can work against distribution of power in society and this is done by the working of political society (Chatterjee, 2004). This mobilization of political society can be a crucial factor in advancing people's freedoms and promoting social equality, especially for marginalized groups that may have been excluded from such opportunities through civil society alone. Furthermore, Political society is a site of negotiation and contestation which often involves paralegal administrative processes and collective claims that appeal to ties of moral solidarity and allows for vulnerable groups to make their voices heard and to challenge the power structures that exist within the modern state.

However, not every group is able to function effectively in political society, and as already discussed, its success is also often temporary. For instance, the bookbinders of Daftaripara could not make their way into political society and lacked a resident community. Additionally, local consensus among rival political representatives may not always reflect the needs and desires of the entire community and could neglect demands of locally marginalized groups; for example, it could be insensitive to gender or minority issues.

**International-National Law:** negotiation of external predatory influences and internal conflict management on gender, violence, and state power (studies of Kelly, and Wimpelmann)

In his "International Biopolitics; Foucault, Globalisation and Imperialism", Kelly (2010) begins with Foucault's notion of biopolitics, which refers to the technology of power aimed to control populations. He argues that migration is a form of biopolitical parasitism, with rich countries drawing life from the pool of humanity outside their populations. In addition to this, foreign aid has also been categorized as a tool to further biopolitics; the overall effect of aid is in the self-interest of the richer countries (Kelly, 2010). Additionally, imperialism is also mentioned to have a biopolitical character. "Imperialism" has been defined by Kelly as regular relationships in which one part of the world benefits at the expense of another.

At the end, Kelly discusses the resistance against biopolitical imperialism and explores different approaches to challenging it. One possibility is for governments to defy the relationships associated with biopolitical imperialism, such as preventing emigration, refusing aid, and resisting invasion. However, completely preventing emigration raises concerns about using repressive measures against potential emigrants. Cuba has been cited as an anomaly in biopolitical development. Despite being poor, Cuba has managed to control and care for its population, resulting in positive health indicators such as low infant mortality rates. The state's orientation towards the health of the population, even in the face of poverty, demonstrates the potential for biopolitical success in the absence of imperialism.

On the other hand, North Korea represents a different case of anti-imperialism's biopolitics. Although there is limited reliable data on North Korea, reports indicate that the country has suffered famine and millions of deaths, particularly among agricultural workers. Paradoxically, this does not necessarily imply a failure of biopolitics, as North Korea's policies of isolationism and micro-self-sufficiency prioritize national security over the well-being of its population (Kelly, 2010).

Michel Foucault suggests that a biopolitics free of state racism should be developed. This would involve the abolition of sovereign power domestically and at borders. The ultimate aim, according to Foucault, would be to

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establish a global biopolitics that protects and promotes life for all of humanity. However, such a biopolitical system does not currently exist due to the resilience of imperialism, which is deeply ingrained in the existing political system.

In “Runaway Women”, Torunn Wimpelmann (2017) discusses the case of Afghanistan in relation to eloped women and the way government handled this issue. His study highlights the internal conflict management on gender, violence, and state power. He argues that with the resurgence of Islamist political movements towards the end of the twentieth century, many countries saw attempts to “*re-Islamize*” criminal law, particularly as new leaders sought to *derive political legitimacy* from a declared project to restore the Islamic credentials of society. Additionally, in Afghanistan, *hadd* punishments were largely symbolic in the legal system until the emergence of the mujahedin and then the Taliban, who called for the revival of such punishments. The stoning was not just about the transgression of the accused parties, but also a *political message* that the Taliban was in charge in the area and uncompromising in implementing Islamic tenets (Wimpelmann, 2017).

Furthermore, the government formally recognized state-implemented Islamic punishments for sexual transgressions but relegated much of the power to police sexuality to families, who could accuse women of crimes simply for being outside familial supervision. In this sense, government complicity in facilitating family control over women was potentially significant (Wimpelmann, 2017). But the idea that the state should reinforce families' authority over women was contested and tenuous, having surfaced as part of the political projects of the Taliban and the mujahedin.

**Development Within and Without:** the implications of national and supra-national development on the nation-state (studies of Brass; Calabrese).

Brass (2002), in his “India, Myron Weiner and the Political Science of Development” , argues that there has been an intellectual gap in understanding Indian politics due to a *developmentalist* perspective that influenced the work of scholars like Weiner. The developmentalist framework, associated with India's political elites, was conservative and focused on maintaining order and eliminating unrest. However, it failed to transform India into the envisioned modern industrial state, address the basic needs of the people, or foster Hindu-Muslim accommodation (Brass, 2002). He points to the challenges faced by Indian political elites in pursuing simultaneous development in the political, economic, and social realms. Brass suggests that the developmentalist perspective and the focus on simultaneous development have become intellectual dead-ends and proposes exploring alternative questions and perspectives.

He highlights the existence of a gap between political cultures and discourses in Indian politics, which has hindered effective communication and understanding. The developmentalist framework, existing for the past 50 years, has influenced and limited the critique of Indian politics. The author acknowledges the value of empirical work but emphasizes the need for an intellectual foothold to launch a comprehensive critique of Indian politics and practices of development. Various issues like illiteracy, child labor, communal violence, poverty, caste and gender inequalities, corruption, state terrorism, militarized nationalism, and lack of dissent require attention beyond the developmentalist framework (Brass, 2002). At the end, he calls for examining forms of resistance and unconventional phenomena like suicide deaths as avenues for critique, using detailed empirical research and a critical perspective.

To define the implications of supra-national development on the nation-state, John Calabrese (2014), in “Balancing on 'the Fulcrum of Asia': China's Pakistan Strategy”, discusses this phenomenon in Pakistan with respect to Chinese investments. He provides insight into the reasons behind China's increased attention towards Pakistan and the

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potential risks and uncertainties that come with this endeavor. He mentions that China and Pakistan have closely cooperated in counterterrorism activities, including joint military exercises, extradition of suspects, and Pakistani actions to address China's concerns regarding Uighur immigrants. China has also utilized its military and diplomatic channels in Pakistan to discourage Afghan groups from targeting China and has engaged with Pakistani religious parties to address security issues (Calabrese, 2014).

President Xi Jinping's focus on building a "community of common destiny" reflects China's diplomatic strategy to expand its influence in neighboring countries (Calabrese, 2014). However, behind this rhetoric, China has immediate concerns that drive its policy towards Pakistan. China sees a strong and stable Pakistan as crucial for maintaining regional power balance, combating violent extremism, and addressing energy security issues.

In recent years, China has significantly invested in Pakistan's future. The announcement of the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC) during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit in 2015 marked a milestone. The CPEC, considered a flagship project of China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative, aims to establish extensive rail, road, pipeline, and fiber optic connections between Kashgar in China's western region and Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Baluchistan coast. This ambitious undertaking strengthens economic ties and connectivity between the two countries. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) blueprint includes the development of special economic zones and energy projects along the Kashgar to Gwadar route. This reflects the alignment of Chinese and Pakistani energy security interests. China recognizes the need to prioritize joint power generation and energy development projects within the CPEC to address Pakistan's power crisis and boost its economy. Yet, China's emphasis on infrastructure support and investment in Pakistan's energy sector is driven by *calculated self-interest rather than pure benevolence* (Calabrese, 2014). For instance, China's focus on developing the energy aspect of the CPEC aligns with its entry into Eurasian gas pipeline politics.

However, President Xi Jinping's efforts to consolidate power and re-balance the Chinese economy face challenges, creating uncertainties for the CPEC. Pakistan's own political volatility and economic vulnerability further contribute to the uncertainty surrounding the CPEC's future.

**Social Movements:** fragility of a state in facing people's protests and political movements (studies of Waseem; Calhoun).

Mohammad Waseem (1996) in "Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: The Case of MQM", discusses the rise and decline of Mohajir Movement in Karachi, Pakistan, and the role of state in response to its political motives. In 1980s, the Mohajirs began to develop a sense of nationalism towards Karachi and Sindh against Punjabi and Pashtun migrants. The All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation (APMSO) emerged in 1978 to highlight perceived mohajir grievances in order to get the quota system eliminated and to secure the lives of mohajirs against perceived oppression. The same leaders later formed MQM in 1984.

The state's failure to address macro-level issues, such as conflicts between politicians and the military, federalist and provincial forces, and Islamist and secularist elements, along with external factors like India-Pakistan tensions, has constrained its capacity to address micro-level issues in urban Sindh, Pakistan (Waseem, 1996). The lack of focus on urban planning, education, manpower strategies, and migration has led to a situation where the state's service-giving network is inadequate to incorporate a large section of the population. Consequently, the state's shortcomings in citizen orientation, legal protection, and security have contributed to the emergence of ethnicity as a defining factor for interests and identity formation. It is not an excessive state influence, as claimed by primordialists, but rather the lack of effective state intervention that has fueled the Mohajir ethnic movement in urban Sindh (Waseem, 1996).

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Rasul Bakhsh Rais (2017), in his “Islam, Ethnicity and Power Politics”, discusses the idea of identity formation in post-colonial societies and talks specifically about Pakistan. He points that the idea of Western nation-state could not necessarily be applied to the case of India and Pakistan because of the ethnic, lingual and religious heterogeneity in such states. Furthermore, the state has played a central role in exacerbating ethnic conflicts through policies of discrimination, marginalization, and repression, as well as through the use of force against marginalized communities (Rais, 2017). The lack of political representation and economic opportunities for ethnic minorities has fueled resentment and anger, leading to violent conflict and social unrest.

Similarly, “Protest in Beijing: the conditions and importance of the Chinese student movement of 1989” by Calhoun (1989), explores the domestic crisis that prevailed in China in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the role of state in combating those elements which gave rise to such movements. In the 1980s, as reforms progressed in China, two tensions began to develop. The first was a split between two types of intellectuals: technocrats focused on applied sciences and humanistic or cultural scholars concerned with the absence of a clear vision of what it meant to be Chinese in the era of reform (Calhoun, 1989). The government favored the technocrats, leading to growing discontent among the humanistic scholars who felt marginalized and concerned for China's future direction. The second tension in China during the 1980s was between the government and the growing number of intellectuals who gained confidence and began to push for further liberalizations or to criticize the government. They spoke of democracy and civil liberty.<sup>45</sup> On May 17<sup>th</sup>, more than a million people gathered in Tiananmen Square for the largest demonstration of the Chinese student movement. However, on May 19<sup>th</sup>, the government declared martial law.

Calhoun further highlights the movement's implications for the Chinese government. Despite the government's initial attempt to impose martial law, the movement demonstrated that the government was not all-powerful and could experience temporary weakness and vulnerability. Factors such as ideological and factional disunity, an impending succession crisis, and a lack of clear direction hindered the government's ability to take effective action (Calhoun, 1989). Calhoun also emphasizes that the government's efforts to create a totalitarian state did not completely erase the distinction between the state and society. The emergence of civil society institutions during the reform era suggests that they are unlikely to be eliminated entirely during the repression. The government's severe repression and the need to use force revealed its own weakness and internal divisions, leading to a loss of legitimacy and damaged strength (Calhoun, 1989). The ferocity of the government's response delegitimized both the Chinese government and the People's Liberation Army in the eyes of the people. While the government's grip on the nation as a whole may not be immediately threatened, its legitimacy and strength have been significantly undermined, requiring efforts to repair them or potentially resulting in reduced governance or increased resource allocation for maintaining control (Calhoun, 1989).

**Future of the Nation-State:** (studies of Kothari, Evans, Chatterjee)

Partha Chatterjee (1998) in “Beyond the Nation? Or within?” , builds on Arjun Appadurai's perspectives who suggests that the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is in a terminal crisis. Arjun Appadurai presents two key facts: electronic mediation and mass migration. The combination of these two has given rise to diasporic public spheres that transcend the boundaries of nation-states, creating awareness of cultural identity, transnational ethnic movements, and non-territorial political solidarity. Chatterjee highlights that the classical theory of the family as the elementary unit of social organization has shifted towards a concept of population, which allows for rational manipulation by governmental functions. The formation of modern civil-social institutions by the nationalist elite in India was influenced by Western modernity but also incorporated elements of indigenous tradition; however, these institutions following the normative model of Western modernity, tend to exclude the majority of the population (Chatterjee, 1998).

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Furthermore, the crisis of the nation-state stems from two main factors: the failure of effective governability and the decay or absence of appropriate civil-social institutions (Chatterjee, 1998). In the Western context, immigration and the challenge of multiculturalism disrupt the normative equilibrium between civil society and the state, as suggest by Chatterjee. In the non-Western context, the lack of autonomous civil-social institutions has led to concerns about the tyrannical role of the nation-state. In addition to this, a significant portion of transnational activities today occurs within non-state institutions that aim to modernize civil-social formations. These activities contribute to a transnational public sphere, driven by moral claims based on the existence of a universal civil society (Chatterjee, 1998).

Rajni Kothari (1995) in “Under Globalisation: Will Nation State Hold?” examines the idea that nation-state is in trouble, with a special focus on India. He argues that the retreat of state is taking place as a result of *global order and market*, and the nation is eroding because of challenges posed by different regions and nationalities from within. In the specific context of India and other developing countries, three important trends can be observed. Firstly, there is a rise of *sub-national consciousness* challenging central authority. Secondly, *the national elite* is turning away from the challenges of nation-building and development, seeking assistance from international and transnational agencies instead. The nexus between national chauvinism and the international regime of liberalization and privatization can lead to suppression of ethnic minorities and geopolitical conflicts, e.g. in Kashmir, Iran, Iraq (Kothari, 1995). Lastly, new organizational forms, such as *transnational corporations* and security regimes, are transcending states and nations, contributing to the emergence of a new institutional apparatus. The global corporate enterprise has created a divide between globalized regions and those left out of the process of globalization (Kothari, 1995).

In addition to this, the private sector, along with mass media and advertising agencies, shapes people's choices and tastes. If given the opportunity, argues Kothari, these forces will undermine democratic politics by prioritizing technological solutions and privatization. However, the democratic upsurge will continue, and the main counter to globalization and the erosion of independent political structures will come from local and national political spaces, where socially peripheral but politically ascendant groups, communities, castes, classes, and nations will play a significant role (Kothari, 1995).

## Conclusion

In this paper, the focus was on examining the future of the nation-state, taking into consideration the perspectives of Ernest Renan and Clifford Geertz. The introduction provided an overview of Renan's ideas on the nation-state, emphasizing the concept of shared cultural heritage and the reconciliation of conflicting national interests. It pointed that nation-state is something that is not eternal and is emerged out of certain historical processes, as argued by Renan. Geertz's viewpoint on post-colonial states and the challenges they face in fitting into the Western idea of the nation-state was also discussed. The main focus of the paper was centered on the future of nation-state especially in relation to the developing countries.

The analysis section delved into various aspects related to the future of the nation-state, including the role of the public sphere, international-national law, development, and social movements. Each topic highlighted key-points in relation to the notion of nation-state in the era of globalization. According to Chatterjee, the public sphere plays a crucial role in creating a sense of political society. Communities organize themselves to make their voices heard, mobilize support, and negotiate with the government. Political representatives and welfare associations are key players in mediating between the public and the government. However, success in the public sphere is often temporary, and marginalized groups may struggle to be included. Kelly takes forward Foucault's depiction of world politics and states that governments negotiate predatory influences outside the state through measures like controlling migration and resisting imperialism. The concept of biopolitics is explored, where rich countries draw

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resources from outside their populations. Wimpelmann's elaboration of government control of marginalized segments is also discussed. The competing governments in Afghanistan have taken different approaches to address conflictive positions on gender, violence, and state power. While some governments have sought to re-Islamize criminal law and enforce strict punishments, others have recognized the role of families in policing sexuality. The issue of reinforcing family authority over women has been contested, often aligning with the political agendas of specific groups such as the Taliban and the mujahedin.

The implications of national and supra-national development on the nation-state are also examined. In his article, brass highlights how the developmentalist perspective in India is critiqued for its limited focus and failure to address societal challenges. Alternative approaches and unconventional phenomena are suggested for comprehensive analysis. The impact of China's investments in Pakistan is also discussed in Calabrese's paper, highlighting the alignment of interests between the two countries but acknowledging the uncertainties and risks involved.

The fragility of a state in the face of people's protests and political movements is explored by quoting two important case studies. The rise and decline of the Mohajir Movement in Karachi, Pakistan, demonstrate the role of state shortcomings and ethnic identity formation, as discussed by Mohammad Waseem. Ethnic conflicts and the use of force against marginalized communities contribute to social unrest. The Chinese student movement of 1989 in Beijing revealed the weaknesses and divisions within the government, leading to a loss of legitimacy and damaged strength, as mentioned by Calhoun.

**Chatterjee and Kothari**, while discussing the future of the nation state, argue that the nation-state faces grave threats to its longevity. Factors such as diasporic public spheres, the exclusionary nature of civil-social institutions, sub-national consciousness, reliance on international agencies, and the emergence of new organizational forms contribute to the crisis. However, the preservation of independent political structures and the democratic upsurge from local and national political spaces offer potential resistance to these challenges.

The paper highlighted the significance of understanding the evolving nature of the nation-state in a globalized world. By considering both internal and external factors, the paper contributed to a nuanced examination of the future prospects of nation-states, emphasizing the importance of addressing issues such as sovereignty, internal divisions, marginalized groups, and inclusive governance. Otherwise, the future of nation state is in a state of crisis especially in the developing region.

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