Contesting sovereignties in the global crisis of authority

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Introduction

An essential element of both political theory and discourse, the notion of sovereignty has undergone significant transformations in recent years. This shift, both semantic and practical, is not unprecedented; rather, it is inherent to a concept that remains thin and contested. This impermanence is central to contemporary analyses of the role both state and non-state actors play in a context of multi-faceted crises of the capitalist system. The polycrisis (Albert, 2024; Fernandes, 2023; Morin & Kern, 1999), whose pressing aspects include the precarization of labour, deepening inequalities, and the climate emergency, elevates the disputed meaning of sovereignty to a key factor determining the authority and ability of political groups and institutions to address these issues effectively. Hence, the proposed discussion of sovereignty dispersion in the After Order project.

Sovereignty, for one, sits at the very definition of the nation-state, generally understood in terms of the state's autonomy over territory and resources, and resistance to the interference of external entities - whether other states or international institutions. However, this broad understanding, which departs from a Realist theoretical perspective, embeds presuppositions of what autonomy, power and agency mean. It understates the actual restraints imposed on a state's autonomy, including political action of non-state actors, both domestically and internationally. Importantly, it also fails to capture the impermanence of its meaning over time - or the disputed meanings of the term at the same time.

In the mid-20th century, for instance, the defence of sovereignty as a state priority resurged shortly after 1945, then regulated by a framework on sovereign countries' exercise of power "in times of peace". Employed by central global powers to justify the escalation of an arms race, it spread its externalities onto less powerful countries – in contradiction with the widely sponsored "right to self-determination" of these not-so-sovereign states. In turn, within the periphery, it served as a counterweight to automatic, sometimes necessary, alignment with these global powers. In these peripheral countries, when appropriated by right-wing nationalism, it shaped rhetoric around the protection of strategic national resources from foreign exploitation, while simultaneously failing to regulate their predatory extraction by both domestic and foreign capital. This duality often accommodated a divergence between conservative nationalists and local liberal elites. Similarly, the developmentalist and decolonial left invoked sovereignty in its denunciation of imperialism, despite the paradox of sovereignty itself being historically shaped by imperialist structures (Mihatsch & Mulligan, 2025). Even among resistance movements, sovereignty remained an imperative, as exemplified by the left's defence of an ineffective yet sovereign state (Fernandes, 2023).

By the end of the 20th century and into the first decades of the 21st, the expansion of globalisation made the contradictions inherent to sovereignty increasingly apparent. By then, international capital and cross-border productive structures forming an interconnected and interdependent economy renewed the question of the role of the state and its actual authority. In this context, the very pertinence of states' claims of sovereignty was challenged in light of international capital flows and global regulatory frameworks.

In the 1990's, scholarly works began to address assumptions concerning the role of the state in a globalized economy, and sovereignty was framed as a zero-sum game between

the national and the global (Sassen, 1999). Three decades in, however, globalization has not resulted in the demise of the state nor eradicated the logic of state sovereignty; it has instead reconfigured it, generating distinct sovereignty regimes influenced by contemporary regional and global alliances, agreements, technologies, and markets (Mihatsch and Mulligan, 2025, p. 13).

In contemporary politics, sovereignty has become a contested tool of ideological mobilisation. Progressive discourse invokes it as a means to strengthen the state's capacity to protect workers and civil society from the excesses of private capital—such as the precarisation of labour and the private exploitation of natural resources. On the left, sovereignty is debated in relation to its purpose: sovereignty for the people, but are the constituents of 'the people' restricted to a territory?

Conversely, conservative actors deploy sovereignty as a defence against international regulations designed to protect minorities, the environment, and human rights. At the extreme right end of this spectrum, the concept has been appropriated in conspiracy theories such as the 'sovereign citizen' movement on the right.

These divergent invocations demonstrate the extent to which sovereignty has become a divisive, insufficient, and elusive concept.

As Alameda's After Order research project examines the dispersion of sovereignty among state and non-state actors, this literature review provides subsidy for discussion, drawing on academic debates that engage with contemporary sovereignty-related issues. First, it begins with an examination of the meanings of sovereignty, its contingent and disputed nature, and its continued indispensability; second, it explores contemporary analyses of the role of the state and its relationship with globalisation, capital, and international regulatory frameworks; third, it covers the ongoing discussion of the political

appropriation of sovereignty by ideological movements. Finally, it addresses the emerging debates that question sovereignty in light of transnational issues—such as climate change, food security, global inflation, interstate wars and the regulation of capital and communications—and therefore challenge the state as the subject of sovereignty in the 21st century, contrasting it with popular sovereignty.

Meanings of sovereignty

Contention lies at the heart of the definition of sovereignty from its earliest conceptualisations, in the sixteenth century. Tracing the development of the concept back to Jean Bodin (1583) and onto Enlightenment theorists, Howell A. Lloyd (1991) argues that the term sovereignty "denotes a complex idea which defies concise definition", deeming dictionary attempts that allude to autonomy and authority in the exercise of power and rule as "notoriously insufficient" (p.1). Bodin presented sovereignty as the ultimate authority to make and enforce laws. His theory was prescriptive: absolute and undivided sovereignty should be an attribute of a single entity - either a monarch, an aristocracy or "the people". He established a rigid boundary between the sovereign entity and "the government", that is, the institutions through which the sovereign entity rules.

Still, even Bodin's absolute sovereignty, with its distinctive boundaries inside and outside the state, is relativized. As Edward Andrew (2011) highlights, Bodin's prescribed practical limits to sovereign will in private property - over which the private owner's domain would be unassailable - and in people's consent to taxation. His prescriptive definition, as well as the distinction between sovereignty and government, reverberated in reinforcements and challenges from Rousseau's and Hobbes's discussions about the nature of the state,

power and popular sovereignty, making its way onto contemporary thought (Lloyd, 1991; Andrew, 2011).

Despite the disputed meanings of sovereignty or, as Mihatsch and Mulligan (2025) put it, its "shifting nature" over time, the concept remained predominantly associated with the state. It defined the contours of power distribution from the Westphalian international order to the globalized twentieth century, standing as a tenet of political theory and International Relations. Already in 1962, Edward Carr saw the concept of sovereignty as "blurred and indistinct" and, as it became increasingly fragmented, waning in its capacity "to perform its proper function as a distinguishing mark for a single category of phenomena" (Carr, 1962, p. 212). In 1971, Karl Popper questioned its existence - not least as an impossible idea in its absolute form, arguing that no political power is completely independent, nor sovereignty is ever pure (Popper, 2011). Notwithstanding its conceptual fragmentation, imprecision and even impossibility, sovereignty was treated in political theory as a given assumption, akin to religious dogma (Carl Schmidt, XXX) - or as Englebert (in: Mouffe, 1999) argues, an element of magic – an idea later explored by Wendy Brown (2010) as she examines the enduring force of the notion of sovereignty through its theological character.

Brawn deemed sovereignty a "potent fiction", assembled in "a composite figure drawn from classical theorists of modern sovereignty". This composed definition includes "supremacy (no higher power), perpetuity over time (no term limits), decisionism (no boundedness by or submission to law), absoluteness and completeness (sovereignty cannot be probable or partial), nontransferability (sovereignty cannot be conferred without canceling itself), and specified jurisdiction (territoriality)" (p.22) . This set of attributes, however diffuse or unattainable, have structured the internal and external relations of nation-states since the seventeenth century.

Reflecting on the challenges posed by a global economy to the concept of sovereignty and the very subject of the state, Smith et. al. (1999) summarised the then recent disparity between scholarly interpretations:

> Sovereignty is also a term that scholars have cast in different ways. Some, concentrating on its domestic configuration, see it simply as "the state's supreme power" as exercised within set, territorial boundaries (Hall 1984:17–18), as "constitutional independence" (Jackson and James 1993:19), as "self-help and territoriality" (Krasner 1993:301), or "as a claim to the exclusive right to make rules" and to "intervene coercively within its territory" (Thomson 1995:219, 223). Others place more emphasis on the state's situation as a member of a global community, as in Giddens' (1981) stress on the dependence of sovereignty on a "reflexibly monitored set of relations between states" (pp. 263, 282) or Ruggie's (1983) focus on the time-bound ordering of global politics unique to the modern state system. (p. 2).

Contemporary authors have sought to overcome the conceptual imprecision. Stephen Kasner's work identifies and categorises the four main types of sovereignty in practice, that is, four different ways the term was "commonly used": International legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty, domestic sovereignty and interdependence sovereignty.

The first category - international legal sovereignty - refers to states' mutual recognition of each others' formal juridical independence. This independence is sometimes extended to entities recognized and juridical subjects. "Recognition has been associated with diplomatic immunity and the right to sign treaties and join international organizations" (p. 35). Domestic sovereignty, in turn, addresses the distribution of power and authority of a ruling entity within its territorial-political domain. Acting as an external mirror to domestic autonomy, Westphalian sovereignty establishes the exclusion of external authority over such domains. Lastly, Interdependence sovereignty - refers to "a *government's* ability to "control activities within and across its borders (including the movement of goods, capital, ideas, and disease vectors)."

These definitions are not exclusionary, reflecting the idea of independence among supposedly equal entities - sovereign states - and the institutional apparatus that both derives from this independence and ensures its exercise. They can be simultaneously occurring or one can be present in the absence of others. Therefore, they do not resolve the issue of conceptual fragmentation: To Mihatch and Mulligan (2025), the concept remained impractical: "not only in the everyday meaning of something which is too difficult or complex to be useful, but also in that the theoretical conception of sovereignty conflicts with the actual practical implementations of sovereignty." (p. 6).

Motivated by the invocations of sovereignty in contemporary political disputes, the authors addressed the concept of sovereignty from a global history perspective. They provided an extensive review of the shifting meanings and political claims of sovereignty throughout modern history and of the scholarly debates about the theme. Mihatsch and Mulligan recognize this fragmentation throughout history and political practice, acknowledging that states and other entities of power have yielded and negotiated sovereignty, established different levels, created supranational instances of sovereignty. Still, according to the authors, while contingent, situational and "often fuzzy", the concept of sovereignty is indispensable - precisely because it is mutually applied.

One among many examples of the puzzle revealing the contingent nature of sovereignty on political action can be found in Alexander Wendt's social-constructivist proposal of an International Relations theory. While Wendt does not seek to elaborate on a definition of sovereignty, he argues that it acts as a regulator of states' interactions in the so-called international anarchy. To operate as a regulatory mechanism, sovereignty depends on its reciprocal understanding between actors: "Sovereignty is an institution, and so it exists only in virtue of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations; there is no sovereignty without an *other*. These understandings and expectations not only constitute a

particular kind of state - the "sovereign" state - but also constitute a particular form of community, since identities are relational. The essence of this community is a mutual recognition of one another's right to exercise exclusive political authority within territorial limits" (p.412). He addresses the constructive balance of an international system that relies on mutual recognition and collective assumptions about what sovereignty means: "Sovereignty norms are now so taken for granted, so natural, that it is easy to overlook the extent to which they are both presupposed by and an ongoing arti-fact of practice" When acting and mutually recognizing each other as as sovereigns, states are "reproducing shared norms about what it means to be a sovereign state". The institution of sovereignty is therefore a product of practice. "If states stopped acting on those norms, their identity as "sovereigns" (if not necessarily as "states") would disappear. The sovereign state is an ongoing accomplishment of practice, not a once-and-for-all creation of norms that somehow exist apart from practice.

Citing Wendy Brown, Mihatsch and Mulligan agree that sovereignty is a "powerful fiction" (op cit. p. 6), embracing the socially-constructivist conceptualization: "if it is only a mirage, it still impacts historical processes because people and politicians believe in it" (p.xx). They propose a study of sovereignty from three perspectives: a process, a practice, and an idea. Considering these perspectives, the authors present a procedural definition: sovereignty should be understood as "a structured distribution of power – sensitive to the perceptions of defined publics, legitimacy-based, and contoured by practice" (p. 06). Sovereignty could be thus understood as a product of what the authors call a "sovereignty regime", or a common understanding of the concept and its boundaries of legitimacy in a given context.

This notion of sovereignty regime - or the prevailing understanding of the meaning of sovereignty - also echoes Wallerstein's (1999) conception of sovereignty defining the

modern state. To Wallerstein, sovereignty is claimed by individual states in the capitalist system. To be constituted as states, entities claim sovereignty both inward and outwardly - in respect to a state's ability to exercise authority, within its territory, and in respect to its external entities, preventing other states from exercising such authority. This results in an understanding of sovereignty as a necessarily reciprocal concept. The author contends that the reality of the modern state system proves this theoretical formula impossible, as it ignores that its acceptance is unequal, as states face internal resistance to a its inward authority, prompting the enforcement of constitutional law, for instance, and the fact that unequal accumulation of capital and power, resulting in weak and strong states in the interstate system. Importantly, strong states "notoriously do not reciprocate" the sovereignty of weak states (p.23).

It is therefore important to understand and critically assess the prevailing sovereignty regime, that is, the context in which political and normative affirmation of sovereignty are believed to be true and un underlying logic to the distribution - or dispersion - of power, authority and independence. However, as the meaning of sovereignty is disputed, the standing truth regimens are challenged by invested contenders, whether states, non-state actors, political movements and the ideologies and interests informing their claims.

Sovereignty preserves its practicality in terms of enabling constituted powers to tend to their constituencies' needs of safety and dignified survival, one one hand, and to exercise authority and control over those constituencies. It has also retained its importance in contemporary political phenomena, each of its meanings conserving its power to amalgamate desires and consubstantiate ideology.

The role of the sovereign state in a globalized economy

By the end of the 20th century, works began to assess and question the assumptions concerning the role of the state in a globalized economy. In 1999, reflecting on the consequences of decades of increasing interdependence between states and non-state actors - economic or political -, Smith, Solinger and Topic discussed the very notion of the state and the transformations brought about by globalization - not least the relativization of state sovereignty as a fundamental factor of such transformations. The authors argue against the "inevitable decline of the state" as an ideological assumption embedded in neoliberal globalization discourse, often sponsored in academic thought:

> Thus, according to many observers, recent fundamental changes in the global economy make world markets and transnational corporate players more powerful than nation states (for a particularly clear academic explication of this view, see Strange 1996). They amount to a worldwide trend toward privatization and antistatism (with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism and command economies cited as prominent evidence of the state's failure as an agent for prosperity). Instead, the international market for goods and capital (labor is still anchored in national territories) are seen as the purveyors of not only healthy economies, but good governance and satisfied citizenries. To be sure, various "dislocations" will occur and there will be clear "winners" and "losers" but, ultimately, in this vision, the neoliberal process will triumph (Strange 1996; Rodrik 1997). Although recently some of these commentators acknowledge that governments can play a constructive role in protecting workers via "social safety nets" (and may need to play that role again to preserve the legitimacy of the economic system) (Rodrik 1997; World Bank 1997), the general sense of this view is that states are inefficient, distort development, capture excessive rents through corruption, etc. They move by political imperatives, which are wasteful, rather than follow the laws of the self-regulating market (p. 6).

While departing from a different perspective than Rodrik and Strange - above mentioned - Wendy Brown is among the authors who identify a current "waning of state sovereignty"

on account of "growing transnational flows of capital, people, ideas, goods, violence, and political and religious fealty", as well as the increased importance of international economic and governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. A crucial argument in Brown's reasoning is the undercutting of state sovereignty by neoliberal rationality, "which recognizes no sovereign apart from entrepreneurial decision makers (large and small), which displaces legal and political principles (especially liberal commitments to universal inclusion, equality, liberty, and the rule of law) with market criteria, and which demotes the political sovereign to managerial status" (p. 22).

Smith et. al. (1999), in turn, refute the idea of globalization as a new, disruptive phenomenon that challenges the importance of the state and its power to exercise authority, as it becomes dependent on external markets, capital and technology. Their volume aims to investigate the extent to which current global processes are truly novel, and the diverse ways in which individual states respond to these forces, particularly concerning their sovereignty and international economic integration. Instead, it posits that states continue to matter significantly, albeit in evolving contexts, and their responses to global forces are shaped by domestic factors, historical legacies, and political choices. According to neoliberal logic, states would lose their importance and their capacity precisely because they would be deprived of sovereignty. Rather, the authors propose that interdependence might "bolster sovereignty under other [circumstances]" (p. 7).

In dialogue with Smith et. al., Saskia Sassen (1999) furthers the critique and challenges the binary opposition of the 'global' and the 'national', arguing that global processes are deeply rooted within national territories and depend on the active participation and transformation of the nation-state. Sassen refutes the common notion that globalisation

inherently diminishes the nation-state's power and that events within national borders are exclusively national. She argues that this simplistic view hinders understanding of economic globalization's features. "Two notions underlie much of the current discussion about globalization. One is the zero-sum game: whatever the global economy gains, the national state loses, and vice versa. The other is that if an event takes place in a national territory, it is a national event, whether a business transaction or a judiciary decision."

Sassen contends that, instead, the State figures as a negotiator and facilitator of globalisation, acknowledging the tension between that role and capitalists' demand for "deregulation" or dwindling of the state's authority over productive and financial processes. Parallel to the expansion of global markets' liberalization, states have managed the overlap between national law and foreign actors, not least transnational firms and investors, by engaging as primary participants in an international framework of supranational regulation through international organizations, as well as by adjusting the domestic judicial apparatus to accommodate global governance. Sassen emphasises that many key global economic transactions and functions occur within national territories, not just across borders. Even digital financial markets are grounded in material resources embedded nationally.

Therefore, terms like "deregulation" are misleading as they obscure the state's role in setting up new frameworks that further globalisation and transform the state itself. "The problem with such terms is that they only capture the withdrawal of the state from regulating its economy. They do not register all the ways in which the state participates in setting up the new frameworks through which globalization is furthered; nor do they capture the associated transformations inside the state (p. 158)." Examples of this were states' voluntary participation in the WTO, or how international financial institutions conditioned loans and financing programmes to changes in domestic judiciary systems

of recipient countries. These states, as signatories of the international regulatory framework, act as **"**ultimate guarantor[s] of the "rights" of global capital, i.e. the protection of contracts and property rights" (p. 166). It is inside and within the states that court rulings, legislative acts, executive orders, and the limits to private corporate decisions (or lack thereof) take place.

Today, this global regulatory framework - and consequently, the world system - confronts the disengagement from the states that initially sponsored it **(to be developed in the exam of the literature on multipolarity and multilateral institutions)**. This can be understood as the acute manifestation of a process identified by Immanuel Wallerstein in 1999.

Converging with Sassen in the idea that states, as sovereigns, have played a crucial role in facilitating capitalist accumulation, Wallerstein's perspective is broader and historical, identifying a general decline in state sovereignty - not because globalization threatens it, but due to a dwindling capacity of states and the liberal interstate system to address contemporary crises.

Wallerstein adds the element of popular sovereignty in balancing the relationship between states and global capital. The elements legitimating states' sovereignty include not only its capacity to protect capital, but its ability to improve the living conditions and promote security for its popular constituents through reforms within the system. And the failure to do so, evidenced already in the social shocks of 1968 - and in the economic shocks of the 1970's - fueled antisystemic responses. The demands and objectives once articulated in these antisystemic answers were, in turn, absorbed by the promise of liberal reformism in the following decades. "The case we have been arguing here is that globalization is not in fact significantly affecting the ability of the states to function, nor is

it the intention of large capitalists that it do so. The states are, however, for the first time in 500 years, on a downward slide in terms of their sovereignty, inward and outward. This is not because of a transformation of the world economic structures but because of a transformation of the geoculture [of liberalism], and first of all, because of the loss of hope by the popular masses in liberal reformism and its avatars on the left.

To Wallerstein, the notion of a liberal geoculture condenses the centrist alternative to conservatism and radicalism/socialism that has become established as a doctrine within capitalism, through a set of discourses in the local and global level ascertaining what is politically legitimate and viable. He identifies a change in the geoculture as a consequence of transformations in the world-economy that stem from its unsustainability: "the de-ruralization of the world, the reaching of limits of ecological decay, and the fiscal crises of the states brought on by the democratization of the political arena, and the consequent rise in the levels of minimum demand for education and health services". Because the sovereignty of the states is a fundamental pillar of the capitalist system, its decay results in a systemic crisis.

Twenty five years on, Wallerstein's understanding resonates with the current dispersion of sovereignty in a global crisis of authority. The undermining of state's sovereignty for its incapacity to tend to its legitimating pillars has faced a process of replacement by diverse non-state actors, from monopolist corporations reorganizing (and eroding) the distribution of labour, on the one hand, to social movements in dispute of territoriality on the other. This time, instead of absorbing the objectives of antisystemic alternatives within a liberal-reformist discourse, it appears that the stakeholders in the protection of capital have embraced antisystemic and antistate (albeit not anti-nation) discourse as they seek control of the state-sustained institutional organisms. Examples of that reframing are abundant in extremist platforms and "outsider" leaders that lever on the

liberal-democratic structures to access political power. At the centre of this reframing lies the disputed notion of sovereignty: who is entitled to power and authority in a changing global order?

Political appropriation and ideological conceptions of sovereignty

Conflicting and often contradictory claims of sovereignty in the platforms of political groups currently defying the liberal order, both domestically and internationally, motivated Mihatsch and Mulligan's comprehensive examination of the concept's history and meanings. A current, visible dispute for - and possible shift of - the standing "sovereignty regime" lies at the centre of the authors' recent argument, as they observe the rhetoric of "taking back control" against supranational rule in Euro-skeptic movements. "We soon realised that this was probably the least interesting question, as sovereignty had become a buzzword, often devoid of substance and at times functioning merely as a dog whistle to refer to questions of migration (Mihatsch & Mulligan, 2025)

Sovereignty as a "buzzword" – as they put it – has nonetheless mobilized political discourse in countries which are not formally subjected to supranational governance, but where political groups claim to have their government's autonomy thwarted by both instruments of a liberal international framework. Whether the campaign carried out by US Republican Party – largely dominated by Donald Trump – against the ICC, UNFCCC or WHO, or the conspiratorial anti-globalist rhetoric that marked Brazil's *Bolsonarismo*, for instance, emerged as variants of sovereignty reclamations – even as the meanings attributed to sovereignty were often fuzzy and ill-defined in terms of the limitations they faced.

The notion of sovereignty has even given shape to the action and discourse of individuals now adhering to fringe currents in the radical and extreme right-wing. Kochi (2025) discusses the "sovereign citizen" wave that has sparked protests by individuals renouncing subjection to state authority and law.

The literature has yet to investigate the substance of the apparent shift in the sovereignty regime – not least how "sovereignism" has been efficiently applied in different national contexts with clearly diverging targets. As right-wing authoritarianism increases its political relevance in the global south, these groups' sovereignty claims have changed, no longer referring to imperial or colonial forces, or predatory international capital as contending political forces acting as "authority usurpers" in power disputes.

Conversely, to the left of the political spectrum – and in resonance with Wallerstein's perception of the state's inability to tend to the needs of popular strata – parties and movements reclaim popular sovereignty as a means to leverage their weight in the distribution of power within the state.

Reflecting on Mihatsch and Mulligan's discussion of how sovereign statehood grew alongside imperialism, and the contemporary forms of sovereignty claims, Sabrina Fernandes (2023) identifies an underlying logic of competition and exclusion in the contemporary conception of sovereignty. Indelibly shaped by imperialism, the notion of sovereignty reflects the competition for authority and distribution of power as a finite resource, rather than just an assertion – or mutual recognition – of authority and autonomy. This is evidenced as, even among peripheral, decolonial and anti-imperialist discourses, sovereignty claims are framed in self-assertion by "traditional developmentalist perspectives on the periphery, which claim a version of 'finally us' to argue for their own turn to engage in predatory extractivism, anti-refugee policies, and

chauvinistic sanitary measures in order to assert their own sovereignty against imperial interference and neo-colonialism".

The contemporary questions underlying sovereignty

Both the traditional conceptions of sovereignty and its emerging contestations have failed to fully contemplate the contemporary challenges to states and peoples as sovereigns. If state sovereignty faces a process of waning, captured from different perspectives by Brown and Wallerstein, but the liberal state's structure still holds an operating framework for powerful non-state actors, as Smith et. al. and Sassen identify, the relationship between power holders and the capacity to exercise authority should be further examined.

The dispersion of sovereignty amidst non-state actors exposes the questions of legitimacy in the exercise of authority and its effects on the state. This authority has often been carried out by non-state actors, from paramilitary groups to international institutions and powerful transnational corporations. However, sovereignty dispersion is deepened by the use of the liberal state's structure. The current textbook case is that of the United States, as a policy organization without formal political representation - Heritage Foundation - controlled a government programme based, not coincidentally, on the idea of "recovering America's sovereignty". Also in Trump's US, an unelected entrepreneur was given authority to undercut government spending.

The issue, however, is obviously not contained in one state's dismantling. Near-monopolistic and translational technology, communications and marketplace

corporations have also leaned on the state's structure to impose their opaque "terms and conditions" in defiance of national legal frameworks around the world. At the same time, open-capital extractivist companies are treated with leniency as to their environmental standards in a sovereignist logic of national growth, at the expense of a generalised, cross-boundary distribution of costs.

As the liberal states offer their structure to enable non-state sovereigns, they normalize economic dependence within the mainstream notions of sovereignty. Conceding to capital, states lose their capacity to be a conveyor or popular sovereignty, but retain their authority to repress popular dissatisfaction. Strategic territories (e.g., resource-rich accumulation frontiers) become contested zones where state monopoly on violence is undermined.

Furthermore, Sovereignty's indissociable association with nation-state territoriality has also fallen short of addressing people's stakes in multiple, transnational crises. As put by Fernandes (2023), the climate catastrophe, food insecurity, political crises, and rising price levels of commodities, goods and services – all are complex, transboundary, non-linear issues whose solutions are not containable within a single state. A nation-state-centered notion of sovereignty therefore results in deeper crises, as local solutions, such as nationally endorsed just transitions, end up outsourcing their costs onto weaker, non-sovereign states, or non-sovereign populations. Fernandes (2023) hence proposes that "a twenty-first-century internationalist view of sovereignty must acknowledge the nature of international intra-class conflicts, and raises the need to redefine sovereignty in accordance with radical sustainability".

This renewed understanding, calling for a collective reimagining of the structures of power distribution, addresses a key issue in the contemporary polycrisis: the democratic state's capacity to provide safety and contemplate popular sovereignty. As sovereignty emerges at the center of political crises and, rather contradictory, in political discourses, the logic of competitive nation-state-centered notion of sovereignty deepens the crises and diminishes state's capacity to respond effectively, and reduces its role as a legitimate actor, channeling people's agency in reshaping the global system .

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