

# Globalization, Migration, and New Challenges to Governance

NAZLI CHOUCRI AND DINSHA MISTREE

The movement of people across national borders—along with the cross-border flow of ideas, goods, services, and pollutants—has reached unprecedented levels in recent decades. As a result, sovereign states find themselves under increasing pressure to manage these flows and respond to the challenges that the flows create, while balancing the interests of various constituencies, both national and international.

Few countries can escape these pressures on governance; even fewer have been able to manage cross-border flows as if they were routine matters of “low politics”—that is, the kind of politics that contends with issues not critical to a state’s survival. The reason for this is that we live in an increasingly globalized world, one in which territorial boundaries are ever more porous. And perhaps in no other arena is countries’ lack of effective control over borders and national access so striking as in the realm of international migration.

Given that the theoretical sanctity of national borders—borders that delineate the limits of sovereign jurisdiction—has long been a defining factor in the international system, we tend to assume that borders are known, fixed, and permanent. Under such conditions, migration means crossing boundaries. But such conditions can in fact be a “variable” in international politics: Borders are not always fully known, they are not necessarily fixed, and they are not permanent.

At this point we can identify two modes of initiatives that nations often take in an effort to govern flows of people, goods, services, and so

forth. One mode is coordinated international action through various international institutions. The World Trade Organization, governing goods and services, is one example. In this regard the International Organization for Migration, an intergovernmental body, is among a number of organizations committed to facilitating the orderly and humane movement of people. In the second mode, states take matters into their own hands by seeking to buttress their control over entry and access across boundaries.

It is too early to tell which of these two trends will eventually dominate, or if either will be superseded by some other model of governance, but we can almost certainly expect borders in the future to remain at least as porous as they have been in the past. Therefore, to take stock of twenty-first-century international migration in all its various manifestations, it is important to consider the movements of people in light of their interconnections with other contemporary forms of globalization.

Globalization per se is not new. What is new, however, is the nature of twenty-first-century globalization—characterized as it is by considerably greater scale, scope, and intensity than earlier episodes in history, and by its pervasive penetration into societies and across national jurisdictions worldwide.

Likewise, the movement of people is not new. Since time immemorial humans have been on the move—in search of better opportunities or in response to threats, perceived or actual. The movement of people within national boundaries is in theory the prerogative of the nation itself and its government, but flows of people across territorial boundaries are clearly an issue of international concern. And when outward migration results from internal violence, the conse-

---

NAZLI CHOUCRI is a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. DINSHA MISTREE, a doctoral candidate at Princeton University, is one of the coeditors, along with Choucri, of *Mapping Sustainability: Knowledge e-Networking and the Value Chain* (Springer, 2007).

quences become both national and international. Importantly, in all of these cases today, migrations are imposing increasing demands on institutions and policy makers.

As with globalization, the scale and scope of contemporary migrations are unprecedented. But in addition, the various forms, causes, and consequences of migration are all in a state of flux. Consequently, the movement of people that had for so long been relegated to the realm of low politics is now lodged clearly within the bounds of “high politics”—where national security is threatened—with commensurate degrees of social salience and intensity.

The most obvious example is the case of the United States in relation to Mexican migrants. Proponents of a border “wall” suggest it is needed not just to prevent people from crossing, but also to address national security interests raised by the accompanying flow of illicit goods and activities.

### SHIFTING BOUNDARIES

A cursory look at any historical world atlas will show a wide range of globalization patterns spanning almost all of recorded time. Ancient empires were formed through globalization, and their expansion extended cross-border flows. The demise of old empires led to the creation of new states, and with these came (by definition) the establishment of territorial boundaries. However, while territorial borders formally delimit sovereignty in a legal sense, they seldom provide fully effective control of entry and exit. This is as true of authoritarian states as it is of more open societies. No one has devised a foolproof method for regulating population movements (just as no one is able to imagine a way in which pollution can be contained within national boundaries).

Several distinct periods of globalization were observable in the twentieth century, from the outbreak of the world wars to the large-scale process of decolonization to the enormous expansion of international transactions in recent decades. In such cases, the flows of goods and services and even of people across borders were shaped by competition and coercion, but at the same time they fostered conditions for cooperation and collaboration. This has always been so. European nations, for example, competed in their territorial expan-

sion during the initial stages of imperialism, but they also negotiated, in the Treaty of Utrecht, to divide their spheres of influence and colonies.

In the same way, countries have gone to war with each other but at the same time have developed common understandings and legal precepts regarding the treatment of combatants. Over time, we have seen the evolution of a large body of international law and the establishment of a large number of international institutions—covering an ever-widening domain of cross-border activities—that display various degrees of organization and effectiveness. This historical experience and the potential similarities between the past and the present are instructive in helping us appreciate the nature of twenty-first-century globalization and the close relationship between globalization and migrations.

It would be nearly impossible to list all existing definitions of globalization. At best we can highlight a few illustrative descriptions. For much of this decade, many have framed globalization as a process of ever-deepening international economic integration. While McGill University’s Mark Brawley, for example, recognizes that this integration is driven by various factors—including technological and policy changes, falling costs of transport and communications, and greater reliance on markets—he argues that other cross-border flows follow primarily from greater economic integration.

Other scholars go so far as to declare that framing globalization as anything other than driven by economic factors would render the term useless. And still others have attempted to concentrate largely on the domestic impacts of cross-border movements of goods and services. On balance, the consensus is that any social, political, or cultural transformations that have resulted from globalization are secondary to economic transactions.

### IT’S NOT JUST THE ECONOMY

This commonly held view is parsimonious and to the point. The utility of parsimony is appreciated—simplification is often a good way to get at the heart of a matter. We believe, however, that such parsimony misses the fundamental nature of globalization and the truly complex interconnections created by the overall dynamics of the process.

---

*The challenge to governance created by the conjunction of migration and globalization is difficult to overstate.*

---

Our view is that globalization is not simply a process of economic activity that leads to other kinds of cross-border flows. If that were the case, globalization would have ended with the global economic downturn that began in 2007. Yet there are many reasons to expect trends identified with globalization to continue in the coming years.

International migration is a case in point. It is true that many people will migrate if opportunities presented in another nation are greater than the opportunities available in their native countries. Much of the migration that took place during the past several years of global economic growth resulted from people choosing to leave their homes in pursuit of better opportunities elsewhere. And evidence today suggests that some migrants are finding it necessary to return home as jobs dry up. There is also every indication, however, that many people are continuing to migrate away from their home countries because conditions there have grown progressively worse, making other nations seem more appealing.

In other words, during good times people migrate to find better opportunities; during bad times people migrate to escape more difficult circumstances. Each of these situations holds implications for globalization, but perhaps in different ways and with different consequences. To understand better the movements of people across national boundaries, it is necessary to see them as taking place within a broader system of cross-border movements. This in turn requires a broader conception of globalization.

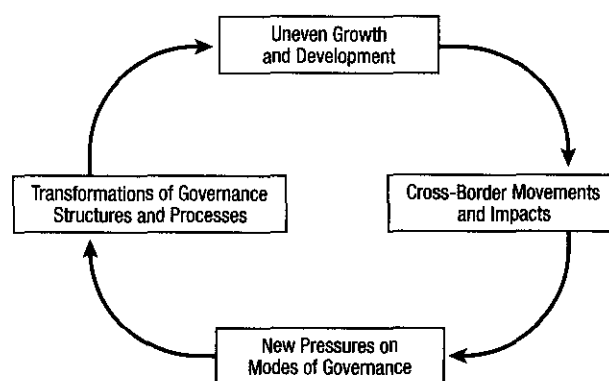
### GLOBALIZATION DYNAMICS

We consider globalization to be *transformations in socioeconomic and political structures and processes* shaped by the movement of tangible and intangible factors, ranging from goods and labor to ideas and services, across territorial borders. Increasing economic interconnections are critically important, to be sure. But they do not tell the entire story, nor are they the only source for fostering other consequences. Indeed, many kinds of international flows occur simultaneously, and to try to figure out which begets which can be a fool's errand. When we examine current trends in cross-border movements, a more complex picture of globalization emerges, one that includes economic integration but is not limited to it.

Twenty-first-century globalization, in our view, is a process generated by uneven growth and development within and across states. This uneven

development leads to (a) the movement of people, goods, services, ideas, pollutants, and other factors across national borders. The cross-border movements contribute to (b) transformations of socioeconomic and political structures within and across states, and also (c) create pressures on prevailing modes of governance. The international flows thus (d) generate demands for changes in governance, which in turn (e) contribute to further changes in patterns of growth and development—leading us right back to (a). Put differently, the fundamental logic of globalization is one of feedback dynamics rather than linear sequencing. A simplified representation is shown below.

The Globalization Process



The post–World War II period in Europe provides a good example of the dynamics presented in the figure above. The end of the war created a need for large-scale reconstruction, and this reconstruction effort was complicated by manpower shortages. Labor shortages were addressed by importing foreign workers who, in some countries, were called “guest workers.” The understanding was that foreign laborers would eventually return to their homeland. But two or three generations later, these workers had become part of the receiving countries’ social fabric.

As a result, governments—in France and Germany, for example—faced conflicting pressures. On one hand, the workers wanted to be treated like all other members of society. On the other hand, the “native” population did not fully accept the foreigners, and some pressured their governments to resist demands for full citizenship. Over time, the democratic ethos in France and Germany created an institutional demand to manage these pressures in ways oriented toward greater equality. The governments developed new policies to facilitate fuller integration. In practice, however,

effective integration is contingent on the overall wellbeing of the economy.

The current situation in some ways parallels that of post–World War II Europe. Today almost everyone is affected by the global downturn. New unevenness in growth and development will almost surely create added pressures on the movements of people and the policies of governments.

Already we see a new phase in the familiar scenario being worked out in the Gulf region of the Middle East. Oil-rich countries, to facilitate their extraordinary economic development, have imported nearly all of their labor requirements. But with the recent downturn in the global economy, these countries no longer want many of the workers. And the workers' own countries do not wish to pay for their return home. As a result they are unemployed, without discretionary income, and unable to leave the region. This situation has given rise to a new label, signaling a new migration experience: the "stranded migrants."

### DRIVERS OF CHANGE

The differential rates of growth and development, which propel both globalization and migration, are themselves driven by changes in technology, resources, and population. These factors thus dictate the parameters of globalization politics: Technology, resources, and population vary according to conditions within states, and they also affect power distributions and relations among states.

Consider some of the implications of this way of looking at the drivers of globalization. Imagine a China with its population as we know it, but with the resources of Saudi Arabia and the technology of the United States. Imagine a Saudi Arabia with the resources of Chad and the population of India. Imagine a Japan with the petroleum reserves of Iraq. Most important of all, remember that it was foreign technology that made it possible for Saudi Arabia to identify its oil reserves, exploit those reserves, and then produce and export this highly valuable resource. And doing all of this required Saudi Arabia (and other oil-rich but population-poor countries) to import foreign labor in order to "redress" their "imbalances" and embark on large, complex projects.

More to the point, imagine an Iran with the technology to develop nuclear weapons, or a North Korea that could actually build a nuclear device. The key point here is that each of the "master" variables—technology, resources, and population—can be manipulated, and at times has been effec-

tively manipulated (with different degrees of effort and variable time constants, of course, not to mention real costs as well as opportunity costs).

An important corollary with respect to migration is this: Depending on scale and scope, the movement of people across territorial boundaries can fundamentally alter the nature of a nation-state's politics, economy, and policies. A related effect is that the cross-border movements prompted by uneven growth and development generate increasing pressures for new management, regulation, and governance.

### A CROWDED WORLD

The various aspects of globalization, as depicted in the figure on page 175, operate at different time intervals depending on the historical context and influence of the critical drivers. Our world today is still defined by the principles of the Treaty of Westphalia, with the sovereign state formally enfranchised to speak on behalf of its citizens. But a number of distinctive features characterize the unique contours of international relations in the twenty-first century—and each of these is reinforced by accelerated migration.

First, the international community consists of more member states than ever before. There are also greater numbers and more types of "voices" in various international arenas. And there is greater representation of individual views on almost all issues, within and across states. This crowding adds to the complexity of governing international migration.

Second, a large and growing number, as well as a greater variety, of recognized intergovernmental entities have emerged, supporting diverse missions and mandates. While there are international institutions designed to help manage migration, they are far from adequate.

Third, a global civil society has emerged, with a flourishing network of nongovernmental interests, agents, and institutions. Many nongovernmental organizations now recognize the salience of migration at all levels, from local to global.

Fourth, much of the forgoing has resulted in increasing numbers of decision-making entities worldwide, with greater global reach, driven by increasingly diverse objectives and strategies. This decision-making density is reinforced by growth in the number of actors and agents involved in border and international exchanges.

Fifth, growth in innovation and increasing social transformation allow more flexibility in

production of goods—in the composition of production, the physical distribution of assembly locations, and the like—thus significantly changing the production process. Such changes notwithstanding, the demand for migrant workers continues to grow in labor-importing countries.

Sixth, increasingly differentiated products and increasingly powerful consumers have resulted in an expansion of consumerism, further driving consumption. It goes without saying that consumption levels respond to the flow of migrants.

Seventh, for the first time in history, an urgent threat to the environmental conditions and life-supporting properties of the entire planet is recognized as the cumulative effect of human actions, insofar as they are altering the global climate. Environmental and resource pressures appear certain to increase migration further.

Eighth, the globalization process has contributed to the forging of a new virtual arena, cyberspace, in which individuals can interact and, in so doing, engage in political discourse in ways that were earlier restricted to states. Earlier phases of globalization that created new spaces of interaction, control, or conquest (for example, colonies, the polar regions, and outer space) provided opportunities mainly for the few and the powerful. By contrast, in principle at least, cyber venues create opportunities for everyone. The evidence suggests that many migrants avail themselves of the conveniences, and incur the costs, of cyber venues.

Ninth, unrelated to any single factor above, globalization is accompanied more and more by recognition of localization. Indeed, the term “glocalization” is now part of international institutional discourse. This term refers to the sensitivity of local as well as global contexts to the dynamics of globalization. Thus migration, for example, has an impact on the sending community as well as the receiving community. In each case, effects are felt at a very local level and they may also reflect and even generate broader, more global, influences.

And finally, as already noted, all of these factors are further reinforced by the accelerated movement of people across territorial boundaries—voluntary and nonvoluntary, organized and non-organized—from developing to industrial nations, as well as among developing countries.

Accelerated migration in combination with the other factors listed above creates new pressures for governance of one sort or another, in the effort to manage some of the unforeseen or complex correlates and consequences of globalization.

## VARIETIES OF MOBILITY

The movement of people across territorial borders, as a manifestation of globalization, can also be traced to the earliest forms of organized societies—earlier than the state system of the modern era. Migration, in contrast to trade, is seldom encouraged as a form of sustained international transaction or interaction. It is also highly variable in its manifestations, as it is in its sources and consequences. The usual distinction between voluntary and nonvoluntary mobility represents only the tip of a highly complex iceberg of social relations, economic correlates, and political impacts—at both ends of the migration stream.

The impacts of migrations are enormous and long-lasting. Indeed, when coupled with settlement intents and practices, the large-scale movements of people across long distances often constitute the foundations for a new social order and a source of state building, a base on which subsequent generations have pursued and reinforced the visions of the early settlers.

On the basis of this statement, given that such processes take place largely without conflict, one might get the impression that migration tends to flow to “empty” lands, and that the net effect is to provide new residents with new opportunities in areas that otherwise would be devoid of human settlement. Nothing could be more misleading. For the most part, permanent settlements resulting from migration are usually preceded by violent interaction between the migrants and the “natives.” The proclamation of a new state is then the last step in a highly complex dynamic of conflict, competition, and domination by the newcomers.

And permanent settlement, of course, is only one of many forms of voluntary mobility. There are many others, as we shall note further along, and there are also many forms of forced, induced, coerced, or otherwise nonvoluntary movements of people. To simplify, different forms of migration contribute differently to pressures for governance, as do different modes of globalization at different times and in different regions of the world.

---

*Globalization is not simply a process of economic activity that leads to other kinds of cross-border flows.*

---

Yet only a very few and distinctive forms of population movements have been formally regulated by states or made routine by international institutions. Even in the few instances in which mobility is taken into account in various official statistics, record keeping usually focuses on formal immigration, tourism, organized travel, pilgrimage, and other routine movements.

On the coercion side of the ledger, migration is the subject of international management under very distinctive and even restrictive definitions. For example, the status of “refugee” is a formal one defined by international law, but it does not cover all the people who cross boundaries because they are persecuted or pushed out, or because they are caught in the crossfire of hostilities. International agencies that manage refugees are not usually expected to extend their services to other displaced persons who do not qualify for this (relatively fortunate) status.

### MIGRATION MOTIVES

A basic assumption of our view of the world is that each statistic is an indicator—and consequence—of discrete decisions by individual humans, as governed by their preferences. Population growth, for example, is in fact the outcome of a large number of discrete private decisions (whether free or coerced) over which policy makers or national governments are not likely to have direct control.

In this connection, if there is any determinism in the logic that results in uneven growth and development, it is a determinism driven by individual decision making. Whole societies may drift in a certain way, as characterized by certain reproductive patterns, and regardless of leaders’ influence, because millions of private citizens are behaving in normal and often most legitimate ways. The connection to migration is this: To the extent that population growth exceeds a society’s employment potential, the probability is very high that people will move to other countries in search of jobs.

Indicators of technology, like those of population, are also the observed outcomes of a number of widely dispersed decisions by individual actors (such as developers, inventors, scientists, investors, manufacturers, and so forth). This may be less true in authoritarian systems than in open societies, but the difference may be more of degree than of kind. While the development of technology is influenced more by organizations and

bureaucratic decisions than are trends in population, the fact remains that individual actions are critical in shaping the success or failure of technological ventures. The connection to migration is this: Countries that are resource-rich, but technology-poor and small in population, seek to draw migrants. They compensate for population constraints by importing foreign labor; they counterbalance limitations in technology by relying on highly skilled workers from other countries.

To simplify a complex situation, we find it useful to differentiate among people crossing borders, first, in terms of voluntary versus nonvoluntary migration, and then in terms of motivation for mobility, and duration of stay. Taking these criteria into account, the most obvious patterns of international migration today include the following: migration for employment; seasonal mobility for employment; permanent settlements; refugees who are forced to migrate; resettlement; state-sponsored movements; tourism and ecotourism; brain drains and “reversals” of brain drain; smuggled and trafficked people; people returning to their countries of origin; environmental migration and refugees from natural shortages or crises; nonlegal migration; and religious pilgrimage.

These types are not necessarily mutually exclusive, a fact that complicates any simple accounting of migration. The dynamic status of migrants also adds to the complexity of cross-border movements. For example, migrants may begin their experience with an official employment status, but if their contracts expire they become nonlegal migrants. If a war erupts and they are forced to move again, the same migrants then become refugees. On the other hand, mobility that is nonvoluntary—and regarded simply as refugeeism—may result from a variety of circumstances, including conflict and violence, droughts and environmental degradation, or shifts in territorial boundaries. The situation for migrants is seldom clear-cut and it is almost always changing.

This consideration is relevant for two reasons. First, it serves as a reminder of the relational basis of migration in a globalized world. Contextual factors enter into the definition of migration types and are formalized, sometimes arbitrarily, with reference to both the legal status of migrants and the policies of state institutions. The second reason is that it shows how difficult it is to obtain an internally consistent accounting of international migration by source, cause, category, duration, and so on. This further com-

plicates issues of jurisdiction over shifting forms of cross-border mobility.

The sheer scale and scope of people on the move, in combination with the blurring of borders, creates new challenges for the conduct of international relations and strategies for sustainable development. By extension, assigning responsibility for the remediation of problems generated by past migration-related policies becomes especially difficult. When sovereignties are diluted (or when new ones are created), lines of authority and responsibility also become blurred. Determining who is responsible for what, when, and how becomes particularly vexing.

The leakage of territorial boundaries—the evident inability to regulate and control access across national borders—is one legacy of the current phase of globalization, which began in the twentieth century, and it has become a powerful shaper of international politics. The sovereign state today is a porous entity. Not only do resources extracted in one location usually find their way to another place for utilization and consumption, as mobile capital scours the world for investments. And not only does technology (embodied in human skills or in machinery) move from one place to another (often referred to as the “transfer” of technology), as information moves as rapidly as we wish around the globe. People also are moving across borders in unprecedented numbers.

A second legacy of globalization from the twentieth century is the remarkable expansion of sovereign entities, an expansion that greatly complicates the challenges of international coordination and global management. We must also appreciate that migration can take place, in effect, even when people themselves do not actually move, but when territorial boundaries are changed. For example, the demise of the Soviet Union—leading to a proliferation of sovereign entities—left people in place but shifted jurisdictions.

As cross-border linkages become more prevalent—and as political institutions find it more difficult to regulate cross-boundary flows—states become more interconnected, and governments find it more difficult to exercise control over do-

mestic politics and economies. They become more vulnerable to decisions made elsewhere, as well as to unanticipated shocks or crises—natural or social—that originate outside their formal boundaries. Invariably, states are forced to acknowledge external pressures, yet they may experience greater difficulties in coordinating policies with other states even when they wish to do so.

The challenge to governance created by the conjunction of migration and globalization is difficult to overstate. As people move across borders, they encounter the rules and regulations of the recipient community. Given the diversity of causes and consequences of such mobility, as well as the diversity of the recipient community’s rules and regulations, it should come as no surprise that friction may arise and that the social contract in the community of destination may become stressed.

## MANAGING CHANGE

In this context, the task of governance is to manage the changes and ease the transitions wrought by globalized migrations. Over time the changes penetrate deep into the social fabric of nations, potentially transforming them in important ways, even altering the landscape of the state system as a whole. But trying to oversee this process is complicated because, as a result

of globalization, the structures and functions of governance are affected by processes that operate across levels of analysis and between social systems and political jurisdictions.

Obviously, the pressures on governance are not always met by requisite and appropriate responses. Still, we can recognize that pervasive dynamics of uneven growth and development affect the institutional arrangements that evolve in the course of seeking to manage these dynamics. Further examining these evolving relationships can help us understand the structure of the international system and adapt more readily to the transforming effects of globalization—including the accelerated movements of people. We know that the world is changing. We hope that our institutions manage these changes as effectively as can be reasonably expected. ■

---

*The movement of people across territorial boundaries can fundamentally alter the nature of a nation-state’s politics, economy, and policies.*

---

# CURRENT HISTORY

April 2009

Vol. 108, No. 717

## CONTENTS

- 147 Why Migration Matters** . . . . . *Khalid Koser*  
International migrants have doubled in number in just 25 years. A global economic crisis, growing “unauthorized” migration, and impending climate change seem certain to raise migration higher on policy agendas.
- 154 The Race To Attract Mobile Talent** . . . . . *Ronald Skeldon*  
Affluent countries increasingly compete for skilled migrants. Is the resulting “brain drain” impeding the development of poorer countries? Not necessarily.
- 160 Waiting Games: The Politics of US Immigration Reform** . . . . . *Susan F. Martin*  
American lawmakers have repeatedly failed to enact comprehensive immigration reform. Perhaps an incremental approach would prove more successful.
- 167 A Country on the Move:  
China Urbanizes** . . . . . *Kate Merkel-Hess and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom*  
Today’s movement of Chinese between villages and cities represents the largest migration in history. Efforts to manage it pose enormous challenges for the country’s leaders.
- 173 Globalization, Migration, and  
New Challenges to Governance** . . . . . *Nazli Choucri and Dinsha Mistree*  
Globalization erodes sovereign states’ ability to control flows across their borders not just of goods, services, and capital, but also of people.
- 180 The Rise of Refugee Diasporas** . . . . . *Nicholas Van Hear*  
Networks of refugees who have fled crises are reshaping relations between developed countries and conflict-ridden societies around the globe.
- PERSPECTIVE**
- 186 The Menace in Europe’s Midst** . . . . . *Robert S. Leiken*  
As the children of Europe’s Muslim migrants encounter downward mobility, intelligence officials warn that the chief terrorist threat to America today resides in . . . Britain.
- BOOKS**
- 189 And Now, Reverse Migration** . . . . . *William W. Finan Jr.*  
A recent report details how globalization has spurred labor mobility. But now a globalized economic downturn is compelling many migrant workers to return home.
- THE MONTH IN REVIEW**
- 191 February 2009**  
An international chronology of events in February, country by country, day by day.