

Contested Sovereignty as the Norm: Snapshots from the Continuum of Evolving Statehood from Taiwan to Brexit

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Despite decades of sustained critique and expectations of its demise, the hegemonic discourse of state sovereignty remains not only the anchor of the disciplinary imagination in International Relations (IR), but also a persistent ambition of contemporary politics. This is particularly evident in the long-standing concern about ‘failed’ and ‘fragile’ states, as well as cases of so-called *de facto* states and struggles for national self-determination. Even in countries at the core of international society, whose sovereignty and statehood have long been taken for granted, calls to ‘take back control’ or ‘declare independence’ reverberate in public discourse, mobilize people, and win elections. From the Somali territories through Taiwan and Catalonia to the United States under Trump and the engineers of ‘Brexit’ in the UK, the image of sovereign statehood thus still fundamentally shapes ideals, anxieties, and desires in (inter)national politics, warranting renewed reflection on the stakes involved in different appeals to it.

Against the reification of complete state sovereignty as the actual norm in international relations, we hold a conceptualization of state sovereignty as social construct, public performance, and unattainable regulative ideal – not fixed, bounded, and static, but incomplete and constantly evolving. As such, sovereignty becomes most visible in its aspirational, malleable, and performative dimensions when claims to it are openly contested, revealing absolute sovereignty as an anomaly, if not outright ontological fallacy. Drawing on relevant IR and other literatures, this workshop seeks to explore the ambiguous politics associated with the ideal of the sovereign state in different contexts in contemporary world politics. In surveying a broad range of illustrative snapshots of explicitly contested sovereignty – from the struggle of would-be states for recognition through interventions to ‘restore’ other states to the building of walls at ‘porous’ borders in an attempt to return to a glorified past of supposed autarky – we draw attention to the varieties of current practices and representations of state sovereignty.

In light of the ubiquity and complexity of invocations of state sovereignty in different arenas of contemporary world politics, the workshop is open to (inter)disciplinary contributions drawing on IR, international law, history, sociology, and other relevant perspectives.

We invite in particular contributions that engage with:

- Nationalist, populist, and right-wing discourses on the restoration of sovereignty, statehood, and ethnically bounded political community
- Representations and manifestations of sovereignty in territoriality and borders
- The role of sovereignty in discourses and practices of military intervention, and its rejection, in international law and politics
- Contested or *de facto* states, secessions, and struggles for self-determination and international recognition in world politics and international law
- Diplomatic and para-diplomatic relations and representations of ‘sovereign’ entities
- The dominant role of state sovereignty in IR and the eclipse of alternative visions of political order and self-governance