

Book Guide

The Sovereignty Wars

While the United States has been the world's greatest champion of international cooperation, it has often resisted rules it wishes to see binding for other countries. In *The Sovereignty Wars*, Stewart M. Patrick defines what is at stake in the U.S. sovereignty debate. To protect U.S. sovereignty while advancing American interests, he asserts that the nation must occasionally make "sovereignty bargains" by trading its freedom of independent action in exchange for greater influence through expanded international cooperation.

Summary

Few ideas are as sacred in American politics as sovereignty. From the founding of the republic, through the rejection of the League of Nations, to the present day, Americans have grappled with how to reconcile their natural desire for independence with the need for effective international cooperation. Unfortunately, contemporary debates on how to defend and exercise sovereignty are confused and overheated. We often hear that U.S. sovereignty is under siege and that global bodies are unaccountable and are dominating the will of the American people. Contrary to such common assertions, the United States is not in danger of subordinating its Constitution and system of self-government to international law and organizations. Globalization *does* require Americans to think more clearly about sovereignty's different dimensions and to consider "sovereignty bargains," whereby the nation voluntarily trades off a measure of its freedom of action to cooperate with other like-minded countries. This logic applies to multiple global challenges, from nuclear proliferation to financial instability, climate change, and pandemic disease.

Combining colorful anecdotes and rigorous analysis, *The Sovereignty Wars* shows how America's split personality has influenced contemporary U.S. attitudes toward international law, global security, multilateral trade, border security, and international organizations. The book explains how the election of President Donald J. Trump accelerated these trends, bringing to office an avowed nationalist committed to placing "America First," reasserting U.S. national sovereignty concerns in the administration's attitudes toward multilateral trade agreements, traditional alliances, the United Nations, border control, and the Paris climate change agreement.

The book aims to provide policymakers, scholars, and the interested public with a less alarmist, and more sober, appreciation of what is actually at stake in the sovereignty debate. It makes clear that multilateral cooperation is typically the only means for the United States to control its sovereign destiny in an age of global threats and opportunities.

This book is suitable for the following types of undergraduate and graduate courses:

- International Relations
- U.S. Foreign Policy
- The History of American Foreign Relations
- Global Governance

Essay and Discussion Questions

Courses on International Relations

1. What is the concept of sovereignty and what is its significance in world politics?
2. How has the concept of sovereignty changed over time, and what have been the implications of these shifts for state behavior and world politics?
3. Some describe the principle of sovereignty as resilient and fundamental to world order. Others consider it obsolete and on the ropes. Which of these perspectives comes closer to the mark?

4. What is the doctrine of “contingent sovereignty”? Under what circumstances, if any, might it apply?
5. Is the principle of state sovereignty compatible with the global promotion and defense of human rights?
6. Is the principle of sovereignty an obstacle to addressing pressing global problems like climate change?

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy

1. How have U.S. history and political culture informed American conceptions of sovereignty?
2. How unique is the U.S. attitude toward sovereignty compared to attitudes of other nations?
3. How does the structure of government created under the U.S. Constitution enable or constrain the U.S. approach to international cooperation?
4. What is the relationship between U.S. law and international law under the Constitution?
5. Do emerging global threats require adjustments to traditional U.S. conceptions of sovereignty?
6. What challenges does globalization pose to the substance and exercise of U.S. sovereignty?
7. Are international organizations like the United Nations compatible with U.S. sovereignty? Why or why not?

Courses on the History of American Foreign Relations

1. How did the founders of the American republic conceive of popular sovereignty?
2. How did the U.S. Constitution apportion the people’s sovereignty?
3. What role did the topic of sovereignty play in the U.S. debate over the League of Nations—and the Senate’s eventual rejection of U.S. membership?
4. How did the Roosevelt and Truman administrations seek to reconcile U.S. sovereignty with membership in the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions, as well as subsequent membership in the North American Treaty Organization (NATO)?
5. How did the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama conceive of the trade-offs between sovereignty and international cooperation?

Courses on Global Governance

1. Is global governance compatible with an international system based on the sovereign territorial state, or are the two fundamentally in tension?
2. What challenges do contemporary trends in global governance pose for sovereign states?
3. What can sovereign states do to make international bodies more accountable to their citizens?
4. Should structures of global governance emphasize representation, based on the principle of sovereign equality of states, or instead effectiveness, based on the interests of the most capable actors?
5. Should nonstate actors, including nongovernmental organizations and private corporations, have equal standing with sovereign states in structures of global governance?
6. What would be the benefits and costs, as well as risks and opportunities, of moving from a sovereign state-based global system toward something resembling a world state?

Supplementary Materials

John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

John Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others?* (New York: Encounter Books, 2011).

Robert Jackson, *Sovereignty: Evolution of an Idea* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007).

Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Julian Ku and John Yoo, *Taming Globalization: International Law, the U.S. Constitution, and the New World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Karen T. Liftin, “Sovereignty in World Ecopolitics,” *Merishon International Studies Review* 41, no. 2, (November 1997): 167–194.

Edward C. Luck, *Mixed Messages: American Politics and International Organization 1919-1999* (Washington, DC:

Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

Walter A. MacDougal, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

Jeremy A. Rabkin, *Law without Nations? Why Constitutional Government Requires Sovereign States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Adriana Sinclair and Michael Byers, “When U.S. Scholars Speak of ‘Sovereignty,’ What Do They Mean?,” *Political Studies* 55, no. 2 (2007): 318–340.

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