

**A Critique of Philip Cerny's
'Reconstructing the Political in a Globalizing World:
States, Institutions, Actors and Governance'.**

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Methodological aspects

The paper seems to aim at a discussion of the international state system from a global point of view yet it implicitly bases its argument on a model of state which is essentially Western European and therefore not representative of the variety of different types of state which constitute the contemporary international state system.

Moreover, the paper does not attempt any differentiation between the relative position of the states, in terms of power and resources, within the system.

As a result of these methodological weaknesses, the paper fails to provide any robust analysis of the position and the role of the state which is most often associated with the process of globalisation - the USA - thus undermining the overall validity of its argument.

The validity of the argument also suffers from the presence of many claims which are not substantiated either quantitatively or qualitatively [see below] and by the frequent use of jargon-like definitions not adequately explained.

Finally, the paper does not do itself a favour by basing a major section on conceptual categories - economic, political, social agents - which are later defined as 'crude' and unlikely to add analytical leverage to the argument.

Empirical aspects

I contest a number of empirical claims that are either not substantiated or falsified by the available evidence.

- Financial orthodoxy, which I understand as a preference for balanced budgets over the economic cycle, does not exclude redistribution
- Assertions of a process of cultural globalisation are in contradiction with contrary assertions of cultural fragmentation
- It is not clear whether trade unions are considered 'economic' or 'social' actors as their role is discussed under the former heading and again under the latter
- The idea of 'national economy' seems to be associated with that of autarky which was hardly the 'traditional' way of managing economies
- Who has ever thought that consumers do not have individual preferences but homogenous 'class' preferences?
- EMU as deflationary and cost-asymmetrical - evidence?
- Disillusionment with government deriving from 'political immobilisme' and 'poverty of public policy' - evidence?

Theoretical aspects

It is assumed that all the changes affecting states and the state system have been caused by globalisation and that the latter is a linear-trend process. Both assumptions are highly questionable, as other factors not taken into account by the paper are likely to have had a role in bringing change about and as there is some evidence that globalisation might be a cyclical-trend process rather than a linear-trend one.

More fundamentally, there is a contradiction between what is explicitly identified as the paper's main claim - "political variables are the key independent variable generating globalization at the turn of the century" - and a number of statements implying that states and political actors are 'victims' of globalisation.

Conclusion

The main weakness of the paper is the imbalance between the ambitious breadth of its scope and the thinness of its theoretical argument, partly due to a lack of empirical evidence to support many of the claims.

The paper also makes difficult reading due to the rather convoluted style and the presence of some extraordinarily obscure sentences.