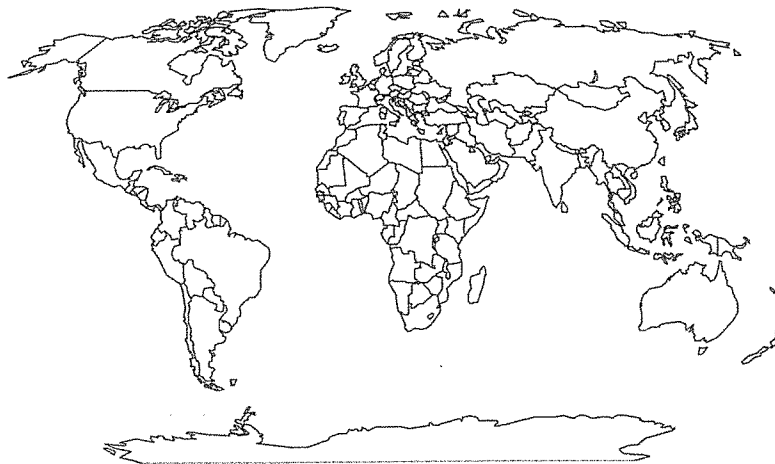


## UNIT FOUR: POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF SPACE

Have you ever looked through a historical atlas of the world to study changes in civilizations and their borders? If you have, you know that change is the rule rather than the exception. The world in 4,000 C.E. looks very similar physically to our world today. If you study familiar land and water shapes you realize that geological history moves at a much slower pace than political history. On the other hand, try to trace any nation in existence today, and while some are older than others, you don't have to go very far back in history to find its origins. Yet no matter what time period you choose over the past 6000 years or so, the political imprint of human beings is there. **Political geography** is the study of the political organization of the planet, a constantly changing collage of countries that once were kingdoms or parts of empires, or perhaps scatterings of independent tribes. Through all the changes, however, one truth emerges: almost from the beginning of history, humans have divided their living space into political units or territories.

### TERRITORIAL DIMENSIONS OF POLITICS



No doubt you have seen maps like the one above many times. But take a look at it with a fresh eye. You see land shapes and a few lakes and seas, but most physical features of the earth's surface are not apparent. Instead, the emphasis is on political organization, the nearly 200 nation states that the world is divided into. Notice the inequality of countries in terms of territory (some are much larger than others), and differences in terms of location. Some countries are landlocked, without coasts on the open seas, but most have direct access to a global ocean. The borders that separate them have resulted from countless negotiations, some violent but others not. This modern state system that the map reflects is the product of a political-territory order with European roots. At the core of the system are the concepts of territoriality, sovereignty, and the "nation-state."

## THE CONCEPT OF TERRITORIALITY

Most people understand that the term **government** is a reference to the leadership and institutions that make policy decisions for a country. However, what exactly is **politics**? Politics is basically all about power. Who has the power to make the decisions? How did they get the power? What challenges do leaders face from others – both inside and outside the country's borders – in keeping the power?

Geographers are interested in the politics of place – how land space is organized according to who asserts power over what areas. The concept of **territoriality** – efforts to control pieces of the earth's surface for political and social ends – is basic to the study of political geography. According to Robert Sack, human territoriality differs from the instinctual territoriality of animals in that it takes many different forms, depending on the social and geographical context. For example, a political leader in a democratic nation would not be able to claim control of the land simply because his father had that control. Instead, he would have to operate within the rules of his society (like winning an election) to gain political power. The rules reflect attitudes toward land and territory as defined by the **political culture** – the collection of political beliefs, values, practices, and institutions that the government is based on.

## THE NATURE AND MEANING OF BOUNDARIES

A state is separated from its neighbors by **boundaries**, invisible lines that mark the extent of a state's territory and the control that its leaders have. Sometimes boundaries are set by physical features, like rivers, shores, or mountains, and other times they are drawn to separate ethnic groups from one another. Boundaries may be set by negotiation or war with neighbors, which often leaves states open to changes in the future. Boundaries completely surround an individual state to mark its outer limits, giving it a distinctive shape. Because boundary lines mark the place where two or more states come into direct contact, they have the potential to create conflict.

### Types of boundaries

Historically, **frontiers** rather than boundaries separated states. A frontier is a geographic zone where no state exercises power, whereas a boundary is a thin, imaginary line. Frontiers provide buffers between states, although states may fight for control of the frontier. For example, France and England fought over frontier areas in North America in the French and Indian (Seven Years') War in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. However, boundaries put states right next to one another, increasing the potential for conflict. Frontier land has all but disappeared from the earth, with only Antarctica and the Arabian Peninsula left with significant neutral zone areas.

Boundaries may be categorized into two types:

- **Physical boundaries** – Physical features are easy to see, both in reality and on maps, so they often make good boundaries. Mountains limit contact between nationalities living on opposite sides, and they are usually sparsely populated. Desert boundaries are common in Africa and Asia, although their exact locations are often not easily spotted in reality. However, they generally prove to be reliable and relatively permanent. Rivers, lakes, and oceans are the physical features most commonly used as boundaries.

Water boundaries are visible and relatively unchanging, and they are typically set in the middle of the water, a practice that follows the **median-line principle**. Ocean boundaries cause problems because states generally claim that the boundary lies not at the coastline but out at sea. Today rights to off-shore drilling of oil and fishing can sometimes be disputed, so international treaties have addressed the problem. The Law of the Sea (1983) standardized territorial limits for most countries at 12 nautical miles (14 land miles), and gave rights to fish and other marine life within 200 miles.

- **Cultural boundaries** – The boundaries between some states are set by ethnic differences, especially those based on language and/or religion. Cultural boundaries are also called **consequent boundaries**. One example of a boundary based on religion was the one that partitioned Pakistan from India in 1947. The borders for the new state of Pakistan were drawn around Muslim portions of the subcontinent, in an effort to separate Muslims from Hindus. The partition did little to solve the problems between the two religions, and in some ways made them worse, as people caught on the “wrong side” of the line struggled to reposition themselves. Language boundaries have been very important in Europe, since cultural identities have often been based on language. Again, the lines are not always easy to set, with the boundary between France and Germany shifting back and forth within a population area with mixed heritages. After World War I the Allied leaders tried to redraw the map of Europe based on ethnic lines. For example, they carved from the large empire of Austria-Hungary several small ethnically-based states, including Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. The Balkans were united under the new country of Yugoslavia, which fell apart during the 1990s into several smaller ethnically based countries, a process referred to as “**Balkanization**.” The Balkans illustrate the tendency for mountain ranges (such as the Caucasus) to form **shatter belts**, or zones of great cultural complexity containing many small cultural groups who find refuge in the isolation created by rough terrain. Shatter belts are often areas of cultural tension that may spread to other areas.



**The Balkans.** This area between the Adriatic and Black Seas has historically diverse ethnicities that were combined into one country called “Yugoslavia” after World War I. The union lasted until the 1990s when ethnic tensions exploded, leading to the creation of new ethnically-based small states, a process called “**Balkanization**.”

Sometimes **geometric boundaries** are set between countries. These are straight, imaginary lines that generally have good reasons behind their creation. For example, when North and South Korea were divided during the early Cold War, the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was chosen to demark communist vs. U.S. control. The method was also used in Vietnam, when the country was split in two at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel to separate the North, controlled by Hanoi, from the South, controlled by Saigon.

## SHAPES, SIZE, AND RELATIVE LOCATIONS OF STATES

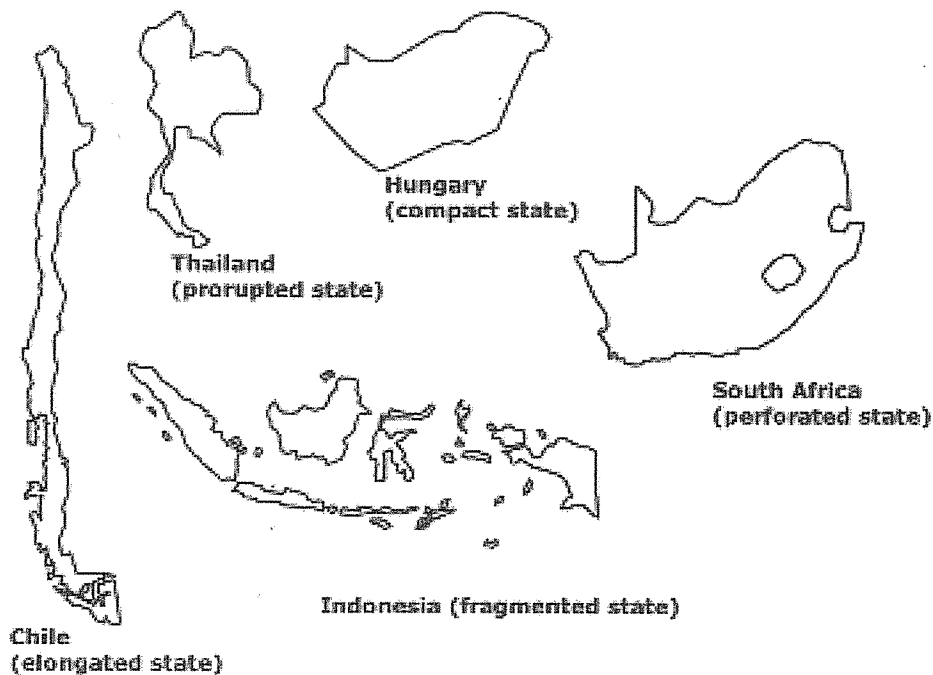
**Territorial morphology** is a term that describes the shapes, sizes, and relative locations of states. All of these characteristics help to determine the opportunities available to and challenges faced by the country collectively and its citizens individually.

### Shape

The shapes of states control the length of their boundaries with other states, and in turn the potential for communication and conflict with neighbors. A state's shape affects cultural identity, social unity, and the ease or difficulty that the government has in ruling its subjects. Countries may be categorized into five basic shapes:

- 1) **compact states** – In a compact state, the distance from the center to any boundary is about the same, giving it a shape similar to a circle. If the capital is in the center, then the geographical location eases its ability to rule. Compactness also promotes good communications among all regions.
- 2) **prorupted states** – An otherwise compact state with a large projecting extension is a prorupted state. Often proruptions exist in order to reach a natural resource, such as a river or the ocean, and occasionally they actually cut another country in two to do that. An example is the Democratic Republic of Congo, which split a small fragment (called Cabinda) of Angola from the main country.
- 3) **elongated states** – These states have a long and narrow shape, sometimes because of physical geography and other times for political or economic reasons. The South American country of Chile is located on a long, narrow strip of coastline between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes Mountains. Gambia in West Africa follows the Atlantic Ocean coastline, but it was carved out of the larger country of Senegal for political reasons during colonial times. Elongated states often have communication and transportation problems, since a city at one end is a long way from a city at the other end. This is especially problematic if the capital is not centralized.
- 4) **fragmented states** – These states have several discontinuous pieces of territory. Any state that is composed of islands is a fragmented state. This can be problematic if some of the islands are remote, as they are in Indonesia. Although the majority of its population live on two of the islands – Java and Sumatra – those on remote islands may be difficult to control. For example, the island of East Timor received its independence from Indonesia after resisting an invasion by the Indonesian army. Once East Timor gained independence, other remote islands (such as Ambon and Aceh) have tried unsuccessfully to secede, causing a great deal of tension within the territories claimed by Indonesia. A different kind of fragmentation occurs if a piece of the territory is separated by another state, as occurs in eastern India, where the country of Bangladesh separates the state of West Bengal from the rest of India.

- 5) **perforated states** – A state that completely surrounds another one is a **perforated state**. The best example is South Africa, where the apartheid (segregationist) government separated primarily black Lesotho from the rest of the country, leaving it completely surrounded by South Africa.



Shapes of states created by their boundaries can sometimes create **exclaves** and **enclaves**. Exclaves are small bits of territory that lie on coasts separated from the state by the territory of another state. An example is Cabinda, a part of the African state of Angola that is separated by the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Enclaves are landlocked within another country, so that the country totally surrounds it. The enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh is an enclave of Armenian Christians who are surrounded by Muslim Azerbaijan. Armenia has demanded that the enclave be included in its territory, with a 10-mile corridor linking it to the country. The situation has caused major tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

### Size

States vary in size from the largest (Russia) at over 6.5 million square miles, or over 11% of the earth's surface, to **microstates**, such as Liechtenstein, Andorra, and San Marino, with land spaces of just a few square miles. An advantage to size is that it increases the chances of having important natural resources, such as mineral ores and fertile soil, but much of that falls to its location. For example, both Russia and Canada are large countries, but a great deal of their land is so far north that it is frozen, making it impossible to farm and difficult to mine in many areas. Small states are more likely to hold homogeneous populations, which decreases potential conflicts within the country, although there are many other bases for conflict than ethnicity. Small countries may also wield power beyond their size, such as Britain, although countries with large amounts of land space often have advantages of human and natural resources. Size alone is not critical in determining a country's power and stability, but it is a contributing factor.

## Relative Location

The significance of size and shape as factors in national well-being can be modified by a state's location, both absolute and relative. For example, Iceland has a reasonably compact shape, but its absolute

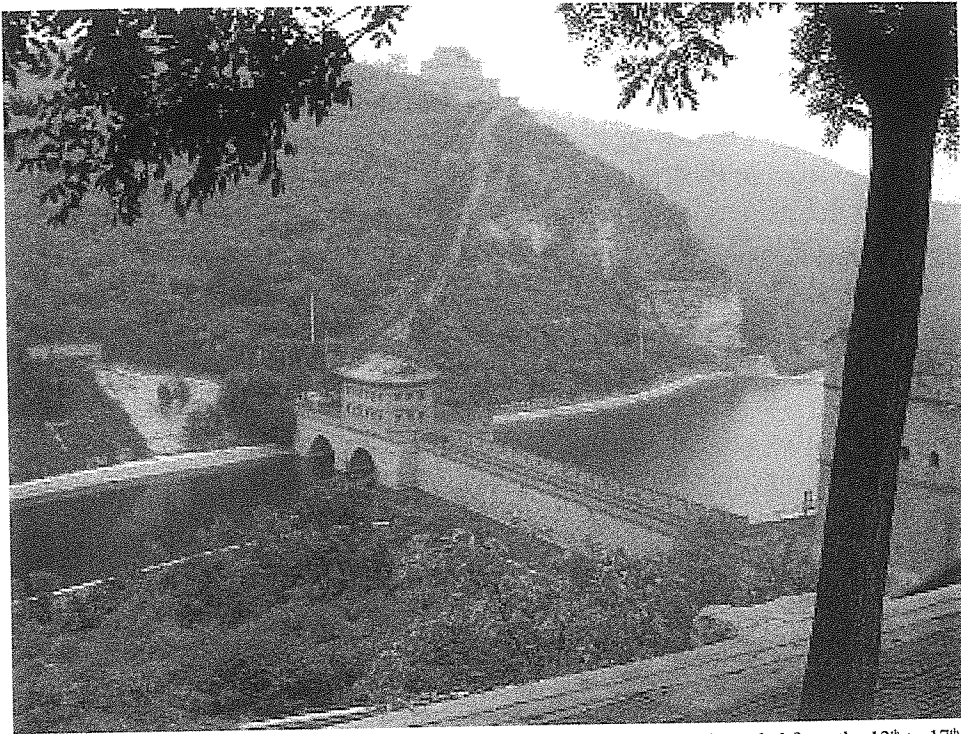


**Liechtenstein** is one of the world's smallest states, called a "microstate." It only encompasses a few square miles, and is tucked in between two relatively small states, Switzerland and Austria.

location at 65° N. latitude means that most of the country is uninhabited, with settlement confined to the coastlines. A state's relative location is also important. **Landlocked states**, those lacking ocean frontage and surrounded by other states, are at a disadvantage for trade, sea resources (such as fish), transportation, and communication. Often a landlocked country tries to arrange the use of a foreign port. There are about 40 landlocked countries in the world, a number that was much smaller before the break up of the Soviet Union, when Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Armenia became independent. Examples of landlocked countries in Asia are Nepal, Bhutan, Laos, and Mongolia. A number of countries in Africa are landlocked, including Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Rwanda, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, and Burundi. In South America, Paraguay and Bolivia are landlocked, and disputes over water access have often erupted. For example, Chile and land-locked Bolivia have not had diplomatic ties for three decades, and the conflict stems from a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century war in which Bolivia lost its access to the ocean.

Sometimes a good relative location is an important asset for a state. For example, Singapore is a very small state located in Southeast Asia, at a crossroads of international travel that links East Asia to South Asia. It has used its good relative location to build industry and communication links, so that today Singapore is one of the most prosperous states in the world.





**The Great Wall.** The Great Wall as we see it today was built during the Ming Dynasty that ruled from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. A much earlier wall was built starting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., but little of that older wall remains today. For centuries, the wall served as the northern boundary of the Empire of China.

### Functions of Boundaries

Historically states and empires have built walls to mark the limits of their governmental control. For example, the Romans built Hadrian's Wall in northern England to keep out the "barbarians" and leave a clear boundary that marked what they would protect and what they wouldn't. Perhaps most famous of all is the Great Wall, built and rebuilt over centuries to keep "barbarians" from the north out of Chinese lands. In much more recent days the Berlin Wall was built to keep East Berliners from crossing into West Berlin, and walls and fences have been built along the border between Mexico and the United States. In all cases, walls and fences have served the function of keeping people *in* the areas where they live, and *out of* areas that they want to enter.

Today, boundaries still mark the limits of state jurisdiction, and serve as symbols of **sovereignty**, or the ability of the state to carry out actions or policies within its borders independently from interference either from the inside or the outside. The shape of the country's territory comes to represent a national consciousness, or **nationalism**. Modern nationalism is a sense of unity with fellow citizens and loyalty to the state to promote its culture and interests over those of other nations.

### Internal Boundaries

Many modern countries divide their interiors into sections marked by internal boundaries. The United States consists of 50 states that are each divided into counties. Canada is divided into 10 provinces, two federal territories, and one self-governing homeland. Internal boundaries, like boundaries between countries, may be physical, cultural, or geometric. Canada's Quebec is primarily populated by French-speaking Canadians, although the boundaries don't exactly follow cultural lines. India's 28 states and six union territories are drawn along cultural lines. People in different states often speak different languages, reflecting the cultural diversity of the Indian subcontinent.

## Boundary Disputes

Since World War II, almost half of the world's sovereign states have been involved in border disputes with their neighbors. The more neighbors that a state has, the greater the likelihood of conflict. Boundary disputes may be categorized in four ways:

- 1) **Positional (or definitional) disputes** occur when states argue about where the border actually is. The United States and Mexico feuded for years over their mutual border, even after it was officially set by treaty in 1848. The boundary between Argentina and Chile has been controversial because it follows the crests of the Andes Mountains and the watershed, which do not always coincide.
- 2) **Territorial disputes** arise over the ownership of a region, usually around mutual borders. Conflicts arise if the people of one state want to annex a territory whose population is ethnically related to them. War between Mexico and the United States broke out in areas (such as Texas and California) where many U.S. citizens had settled, and yet the Mexican government controlled the land space. This type of expansionism is called **irredentism**. A 20<sup>th</sup> century example is the German invasion of Czechoslovakia and Poland, areas with German minorities.
- 3) **Resource (or allocational) disputes** involve natural resources – such as mineral deposits, fertile farmland, or rich fishing groups – that lie in border areas. For example, the United States and Canada have feuded over fishing grounds in the Atlantic Ocean. The spark for the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 was a dispute between Iraq and Kuwait regarding rights to oil.
- 4) **Functional (or operational) disputes** arise when neighboring states cannot agree on policies that apply in a border area. An example is the ongoing debate between the U.S. and Mexico regarding transport of people and goods across their long mutual border. The U.S. has generally wanted stricter controls put on immigration from Mexico, and also has pressured the Mexican government to control drug trafficking across the border.

## EVOLUTION OF THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PATTERN

The world has not always been divided into nation-states. In fact, the current pattern is a relatively new one, with the appearance of nation-states in Europe during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many other configurations have been seen in the past. In ancient times, Egyptians were ruled by pharaohs, who were believed to be descendents of the gods. In contrast, ancient Mesopotamia was organized into city-states, with competing cities dominating the countryside around them. Ancient Greece also was configured into city-states. Another early organization was the “empire,” with a military ruler who conquered and ruled large amounts of territory. Examples include Persia, the empire of Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, and the Han Dynasty of China. In the Middle East, the founder of Islam, Muhammad, established a religious state called a “caliphate” that existed in different forms for about six centuries. Medieval Europe developed “kingdoms,” relatively small areas dominated by kings supported by loyalty ties to the nobles in a political and economic configuration called “feudalism.” The largest political organization of all times – the Mongol Empire of the 13<sup>th</sup> century – was ruled by a “Khan” (universal ruler), a military leader supported by a web of kinship ties. In Central America smaller civilizations eventually came to be controlled by the large Aztec Empire, and in South America the Inca formed a short-lived but powerful empire.



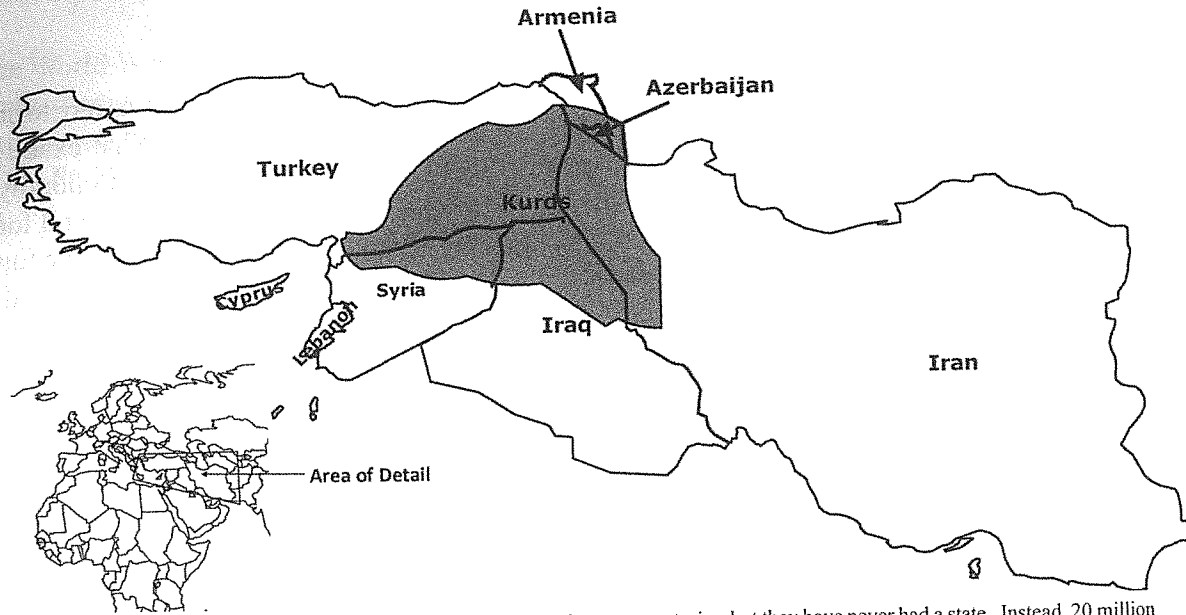
## THE NATION-STATE CONCEPT

We commonly speak about individuals being powerful, but in today's world, power is territorially organized into **states**, or countries, that control what happens within their borders. What exactly is a state? German scholar Max Weber defined state as the organization that maintains a monopoly of violence over a territory. In other words, the state defines who can and cannot use weapons and force, and it sets the rules as to how violence is used. States often sponsor armies, navies, and/or air forces that legitimately use power and sometimes violence, but individual citizens are very restricted in their use of force. States also include **institutions**, stable, long lasting organizations that help to turn political ideas into policy. Common examples of institutions are bureaucracies, legislatures, judicial systems, and political parties. These institutions make states themselves long lasting, and often help them to endure even when leaders change. States by their very nature exercise **sovereignty**, the ability to carry out actions or policies within their borders independently from interference either from the inside or the outside.

States today do much more than keep order in society. Many have important institutions that promote general welfare – such as health, safe transportation, and effective communication systems – and economic stability. The concept of state is closely related to a **nation**, a group of people that is bound together by a common political identity. The term **nation-state** refers to a state whose territorial extent coincides with that occupied by a distinct nation or people, or at least, whose population shares a general sense of unity and allegiance to a set of common values. Nationalism is the sense of belonging and identity that distinguishes one nation from another. Nationalism is often translated as patriotism, or the resulting pride and loyalty that individuals may feel toward their nations. For more than 200 years now, national borders ideally have been drawn along the lines of group identity. For example, people within one area think of themselves as “French,” and people in another area think of themselves as “English.” Even though individual differences exist within nations, the nation provides the overriding identity for most of its citizens. However, the concept has always been problematic – as when “Armenians” live inside the borders of a country called “Azerbaijan.” Especially now that globalization and fragmentation provide counter trends, the nature of nationalism and its impact on policy-making are clearly changing.

## VARIATIONS OF THE NATION-STATE

A **binational** or **multinational state** is one that contains more than one nation. The former Soviet Union is a good example of a multinational state. It was divided into “soviet republics” that were based on nationality, such as the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. When the country fell apart in 1991, it fell along ethnic boundaries into independent nation-states. Today Russia (one of the former soviet republics) remains a large multinational state that governs many ethnic groups. Just as ethnic pressures challenged the sovereignty of the Soviet government, the Russian government has faced “breakaway movements” – such as in Chechnya – that have threatened Russian stability. Minority ethnic groups may feel so strongly about their separate identities that they demand their independence. **Stateless nations** are a people without a state. In the Middle East the Kurds are a nation of some 20 million people divided among six states and dominant in none. Kurdish nationalism has survived over the centuries, and has played an important role in the politics that followed the reconfiguration of Iraq after the Iraqi War that began in 2003.



**A Stateless Nation.** The Kurds have had a national identity for many centuries, but they have never had a state. Instead, 20 million Kurds are spread in an area that crosses the formal borders of six countries: Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

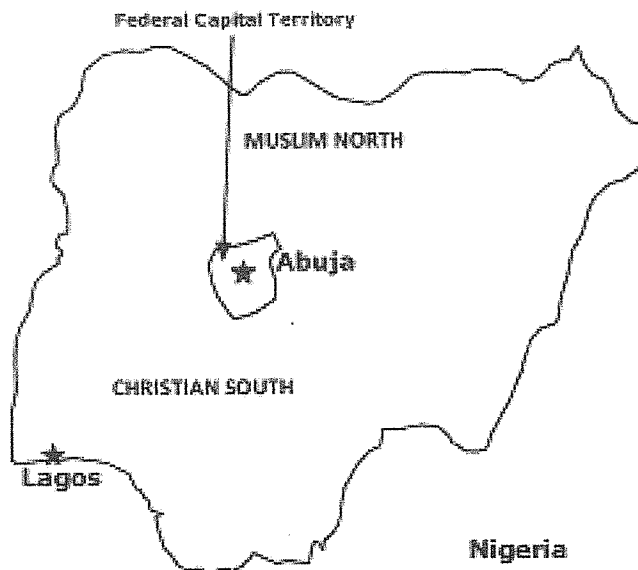
## THE ORGANIZATION OF STATES

Two important geographical clues to understanding how states are organized are its core area(s) and the size and functions of its capital city.

### Core Areas

Most of the early nation-states grew over time from **core areas**, expanding outward along their frontiers. Their growth generally stopped when they bumped up against other nation-states, causing them to define boundaries. Today most European countries still have these same core areas, and many countries in other parts of the world also have well defined core areas. They may be identified on a map by examining population distributions and transport networks. As you travel away from the core area, into the state's **periphery** (outlying areas), towns get smaller, factories fewer, and open land more common. Clear examples of core areas are the Paris Basin in France and Japan's Kanto Plain, centered on the city of Tokyo. States with more than one core area – **multicore states** – may be problematic, especially if the areas are ethnically diverse, such as in Nigeria. Nigeria's northern core is primarily Muslim and its southern core is Christian, and the areas pull the country in different directions. To compensate for this tendency for the country to separate, the capital city was moved from Lagos (in the South) to Abuja, near the geographic center of the state.

A multicore character is not always problematic for a country. For example, the United States still has a primary core area that runs along its northeastern coastline from Washington D.C. to Boston. A secondary core area exists on the West Coast that runs from San Diego in the south to San Francisco in the north. Arguably, other core areas have developed around Chicago and other Midwestern cities, and Atlanta in the South. Despite the multiple core areas, regional differences do not threaten the existence of the state, as they do in Nigeria.



**Nigeria's Core Areas.** Nigeria was a British colony in West Africa until its independence in 1960, but its borders encompass numerous ethnic groups with clear cultural differences. The biggest split, however, is between the Muslim north and the Christian south. In an effort to strengthen the political unity of the country, the capital was moved from Lagos on the southern coast to Abuja, near the geographic center of the state. Despite the move, Lagos continues to be the center of the Christian south, and tensions still threaten the sovereignty of Nigeria's government.

## The Capital City

In most states the capital city not only houses the government, but serves as the economic and cultural center as well. If no other city comes even close to rivaling the capital city in terms of size or influence, the capital city is a **primate city**. In some countries – such as the United States – other cities are as large or larger than the capital city, Washington, D.C. The U.S. capital is not a primate city because it is less of an economic center than cities such as Chicago and New York. However, the political heart is clearly in Washington, and it serves as a unifying symbol for the country.

If the capital city serves as a model for national objectives, especially for economic development and future hopes, it is sometimes called a **forward capital**. Japan's relocation of its capital from Kyoto to Tokyo expressed such a sentiment. A more modern example is Brasília, the present capital of Brazil. Traditionally, Brazil's population stretched along the country's coastline, and its capital had been the great port city of Rio de Janeiro. In an effort to refocus Brazil on its vast interior wealth, its leaders decided to build Brasília from scratch in a location far from the coast. Brasília was meant to symbolize the nation's new continental attitude, and no expense was spared in creating it as a showplace for the new Brazil. Capital cities symbolize their states through architecture, national landmarks, and historic buildings and monuments. Despite their efforts, most people still live close to the coast, and Rio de Janeiro retains its status as the largest city in Brazil.

## ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY

Citizens' commitment to their state may be affected by the types of contacts that they have with their government. In democracies an important connection between citizen and state is the **electoral process**, the methods used in a country for selecting leaders. For example, people may vote directly for a president and representatives to their legislatures (as in the United States), or they may vote only for legislators who in turn select the prime minister (as in Britain.) Elections may also take place for

local officials, so electoral politics may be examined according to geographic scale – national, regional, and local. **Electoral geography** is the study of how the spatial configuration of electoral districts and voting patterns reflect and influence social and political affairs.

In the United States, boundaries separate 435 legislative districts, with each electing one representative to the lower house of the legislature – the House of Representatives. Boundaries are redrawn when the census is taken every ten years to ensure that representation is fair. In most European countries boundaries are redrawn by independent commissions, but in the United States, the job usually goes to the state legislatures. There the political party in control – either Democrats or Republicans – usually attempts to redraw boundaries to improve the chances of its supporters to win seats, a process called **gerrymandering**. District boundaries are drawn in strange ways in order to make it easy for the candidate of one party to win election in that district. The term is derived from the original gerrymanderer, Eldridge Gerry, who in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had a Massachusetts district drawn in the shape of a salamander, to ensure the election of a Republican. Over the years both parties have been accused of manipulating districts in order to gain an advantage in membership in the House of Representatives.

Gerrymandering continues to be an issue in the U.S. today. A more recent form that appeared shortly after the 1990 census is **minority/majority districting**, or rearranging districts to allow a minority representative to be elected, and it is just as controversial as the old-style party gerrymandering. The Justice Department ordered North Carolina's 12<sup>th</sup> district to redraw proposed boundaries in order to allow for the election of one more black representative. This action resulted in a Supreme Court case in which the plaintiffs charged the Justice Department with reverse discrimination, or discrimination against the majority whites. The Court ruled narrowly, but allowed the district lines to be redrawn according to Justice Department standards.

During the 1990s several cases were brought to the Supreme Court regarding racial gerrymandering. The Court ruled in 2001 that race may be a factor in redistricting, but not the “dominant and controlling” one. An important result of the various decisions has been a substantial increase in the number of black and Latino representatives in the House of Representatives. For geographers, the important point is that voting patterns often reinforce a sense of regionalism and shape a government's response to issues in the future.

## COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM

18<sup>th</sup> century European political philosophers developed the idea of the modern state, with the basic concept that people owe allegiance to a state and the people it represents rather than to its leader, such as a king or feudal lord. The new concept was accelerated by the French Revolution in 1789 and spread over Western Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. European expansion during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries spread the new type of organization to the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Usually **colonies**, or dependent areas, were created first, and they were given fixed and recorded boundaries where none had formally existed before. In some cases Europeans took over empires with recognized outer limits, such as the Mughal in India, the Aztecs in Central America, and the Manchu in China. Other areas were loosely organized by tribes. In most cases, the new divisions were not based on meaningful cultural or physical lines, but on the limits of the colonizing empire's power.

The European colonization of Africa and Asia is often termed **imperialism**, or empire building, and it characterized the political landscape during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The phrase “The sun never sets on the British Empire” captures the reach that Britain had to most parts of the globe, as the tiny country transformed itself into the most powerful country in the world. A major source of tension before World War I (1914-1918) was the rise of Germany as an imperialist power, and after Germany was defeated in 1918, the country was stripped of its colonies. Most African and Asian colonies became independent after World War II, partly because the war greatly weakened the ability of European countries to maintain their overseas possessions.

### EUROPEAN IMPRINTS ON AFRICA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

By the late 19th century European countries claimed almost all of Africa. A close study of a map of the day revealed these names of land spaces in Africa:

French West Africa	Anglo-Egyptian Sudan
Italian East Africa	British Somaliland
French Somaliland	Belgian Congo
French Equatorial Africa	Spanish Morocco
Spanish Guinea	Rhodesia
German Southwest Africa	German East Africa
Italian Somaliland	Portuguese Guinea
British East Africa	

Other areas, such as the Union of South Africa, Angola, Nigeria, and Algeria, were also European possessions, even if the names are less revealing. Only Ethiopia and Liberia were independent states. By the 1960s almost all colonies had received their independence.

As former colonies gained independence, they kept the idea of the state to organize their new political systems. They often retained the borders established by their former European rulers, and as a consequence, states' borders many times ignored cultural differences among populations. The idea of nation-states grew slowly at first, but expanded rapidly, particularly after the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time that the United States declared independence from Britain in 1776 there were only about 35 empires, kingdoms, and countries in the entire world. By the beginning of World War II in 1939, the number had only increased to about 70. Since 1945, the number has increased to about 200 nations as a result of a series of independence movements. The first “wave” occurred during the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, when many new nations were created out of former European colonies. Included were India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Burma (now Myanmar), and Singapore in Asia, and Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia in Africa. Another “wave” occurred when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, creating independent nations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Later in the 1990s several new states were created in the Balkans from Yugoslavia. Most remaining dependencies today are remnants of empires, located in relatively isolated areas with small populations, such as remote islands.