KEY ISSUE 1
Where Are States Distributed?

- A World of States
- Challenges in Defining States
- Development of State Concept

A state is an area organized into a political unit and ruled by an established government that has control over its internal and foreign affairs. It occupies a defined territory on Earth’s surface and contains a permanent population. The term country is a synonym for state. A state has sovereignty, which means independence from control of its internal affairs by other states. Because the entire area of a state is managed by its national government, laws, army, and leaders, it is a good example of a formal or uniform region.

The term state, as used in political geography, does not refer to the 50 regional governments inside the United States. The 50 states of the United States are subdivisions within a single state—the United States of America.

How many of these states can you name? Old-style geography sometimes required memorization of countries and their capitals. Human geographers now emphasize a thematic approach. We are concerned with the location of activities in the world, the reasons for particular spatial distributions, and the significance of the arrangements. Despite this change in emphasis, you still need to know the locations of states. Without such knowledge, you lack a basic frame of reference—knowing where things are.

The land area occupied by the states of the world varies considerably. The largest state is Russia, which encompasses 17.1 million square kilometers (6.6 million square miles), or 11 percent of the world’s entire land area. Other states with more than 5 million square kilometers (2 million square miles) include Canada, the United States, China, Brazil, and Australia.

At the other extreme are about two dozen microstates, which are states with very small land areas. If Russia were the size of this page, a microstate would be the size of a single letter on it. The smallest microstate in the United Nations—Monaco (Figure 8-2)—encompasses only 1.5 square kilometers (0.6 square miles).

Other UN member states that are smaller than 1,000 square kilometers (400 square miles) include Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahrain, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Liechtenstein, Maldives, Malta, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, San Marino, São Tomé e Príncipe, the Seychelles, Singapore, Tonga, and Tuvalu (refer to Figure 8-1). Many of the microstates are islands, which explains both their small size and sovereignty.

![FIGURE 8-2](image URL)
MICROSTATE: MONACO The smallest microstate in the United Nations, Monaco is a principality, ruled by a prince.
A World of States

Learning Outcome 8.1.1

Explain the three eras of rapid growth in UN membership.

A map of the world shows that virtually all habitable land belongs to some country or other. But for most of history, until recently, this was not so. As recently as the 1940s, the world contained only about 50 countries, compared to approximately 200 today.

THE UNITED NATIONS

The most important global organization is the United Nations, created at the end of World War II by the victorious Allies. During this era of rapid changes in states and their relationships, the UN has provided a forum for the discussion of international problems. On occasion, the UN has intervened in conflicts between or within member states, authorizing military and peacekeeping actions. In addition, the UN seeks to promote international cooperation to address global economic problems, promote human rights, and provide humanitarian relief.

When it was organized in 1945, the UN had only 51 members, including 49 sovereign states plus Byelorussia (now Belarus) and Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union (Figure 8-3). The number of UN members reached 193 in 2011.

The UN membership increased rapidly on three occasions (Figure 8-4):

- 1955. Sixteen countries joined in 1955, mostly European countries that had been liberated from Nazi Germany during World War II.
- 1960. Seventeen new members were added in 1960, all but one a former African colony of Britain or France. Only four African states were original members of the United Nations—Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa—and only six more joined during the 1950s.
- 1990-1993. Twenty-six countries were added between 1990 and 1993, primarily due to the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. UN membership also increased in the 1990s because of the admission of several microstates.

The United Nations was not the world’s first attempt at international peacemaking. The UN replaced an earlier organization known as the League of Nations, which was established after World War I. The League of Nations was never an effective peacekeeping organization. The United States did not join it, despite the fact that President Woodrow Wilson initiated the idea, because the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the membership treaty. In the 1930s, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Soviet Union had all withdrawn, and the League of Nations could not stop aggression by these states against neighboring countries.

UN members can vote to establish a peacekeeping force and request states to contribute military forces. The UN is playing an important role in trying to separate warring groups in a number of regions, especially in Eastern Europe, Central and Southwest Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. However, any one of the five permanent members of the Security Council—China, France, Russia (formerly the Soviet Union), the United Kingdom, and the United States—can veto a peacekeeping operation. During the

![Figure 8-3 UN Members](image-url)
Cold War era, the United States and the Soviet Union used the veto to prevent undesired UN intervention, and it was only after the Soviet Union's delegate walked out of a Security Council meeting in 1950 that the UN voted to send troops to support South Korea. More recently, the opposition of China and Russia has made it difficult for the international community to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Because it must rely on individual countries to supply troops, the UN often lacks enough of them to keep peace effectively. The UN tries to maintain strict neutrality in separating warring factions, but this has proved difficult in places such as Bosnia & Herzegovina, where most of the world sees two ethnicities (Bosnia's Serbs and Croats) as aggressors undertaking ethnic cleansing against weaker victims (Bosnian Muslims). Despite its shortcomings, though, the UN represents a forum where, for the first time in history, virtually all states of the world can meet and vote on issues without resorting to war.

Pause and Reflect 8.1.1
How might UN membership substantially increase in the future beyond the current level?
Challenges in Defining States

Learning Outcome 8.1.2
Explain why it is difficult to determine whether some territories are states.

There is some disagreement about the actual number of sovereign states. This disagreement is closely tied to the history and geography of the places involved and most often involves neighboring states. In some disputes about sovereignty, multiple states lay claim to a territory. Among places that test the definition of a state are Korea, China, Kosovo, Western Sahara (Sahrawi Republic), and the polar regions of Antarctica and the Arctic Ocean.

KOREA: ONE STATE OR TWO?

A colony of Japan for many years, Korea was divided into two occupation zones by the United States and the former Soviet Union after they defeated Japan in World War II (Figure 8-5). The country was divided along northern and southern sections along 38° north latitude. The division of these zones became permanent in the late 1940s, when the two superpowers established separate governments and withdrew their armies. The new government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) then invaded the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 1950, touching off a three-year war that ended with a cease-fire line near the 38th parallel.

Both Korean governments are committed to reuniting the country into one sovereign state. Leaders of the two countries agreed in 2000 to allow exchange visits of families separated for a half century by the division and to increase economic cooperation. However, progress toward reconciliation was halted by North Korea's decision to build nuclear weapons, even though the country lacked the ability to provide its citizens with food, electricity, and other basic needs. Meanwhile, in 1992, North Korea and South Korea were admitted to the United Nations as separate countries.

CHINA AND TAIWAN: ONE STATE OR TWO?

Are China and the island of Taiwan two sovereign states or one? Most other countries consider China (officially the People's Republic of China) and Taiwan (officially the Republic of China) as separate and sovereign states. According to China's government, Taiwan is not sovereign but a part of China. This confusing situation arose from a civil war in China during the late 1940s between the Nationalists and the Communists. After losing in 1949, Nationalist leaders, including President Chiang Kai-shek, fled to Taiwan, 200 kilometers (120 miles) off the Chinese coast (Figure 8-6).

The Nationalists proclaimed that they were still the legitimate rulers of the entire country of China. Until some future occasion when they could defeat the Communists and recapture all of China, the Nationalists argued, at least they could continue to govern one island of the country. In 1995, Taiwan's president announced that Taiwan would regard itself as a sovereign independent state, but the government of China viewed that announcement as a dangerous departure from the long-standing arrangement between the two.

The question of who constituted the legitimate government of China plagued U.S. officials during the 1950s and 1960s. The United States had supported the Nationalists during the civil war, so many Americans opposed acknowledging that China was firmly under the control of the Communists. Consequently, the United States continued to regard the Nationalists as the official government of China until 1971, when U.S. policy finally changed and the United Nations voted to transfer China's seat from the Nationalists to the Communists. Taiwan is now the most populous state not in the United Nations.
**WESTERN SAHARA (SAHRAWI REPUBLIC)**

The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, also known as Western Sahara, is considered by most African countries as an independent state. Morocco, however, claims the territory and proved it has built a 2,700-kilometer (1,700-mile) wall around the territory to keep out rebels (Figure 8-7). Spain controlled the territory on the continent’s western coast between Morocco and Mauritania until withdrawing in 1976. An independent Sahrawi Republic was declared by the Polisario Front and recognized by most African countries, Morocco and Mauritania annexed the northern and southern portions, respectively. Three years later Mauritania withdrew, and Morocco claimed the entire territory. Morocco controls most of the populated area, but the Polisario Front operates in the vast, sparsely inhabited desert, especially the one-fifth of the territory that lies east of Morocco’s wall. The United Nations has tried but failed to reach a resolution among the parties.

**POLAR REGIONS: MANY CLAIMS**

The South Pole region contains the only large landmasses on Earth’s surface that are not part of a state. Several states claim portions of the region, and some claims are overlapping and conflicting. Several states, including Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom, claim portions of Antarctica (Figure 8-8). Argentina, Chile, and the United Kingdom have made conflicting, overlapping claims. The United States, Russia, and a number of other states do not recognize the claims of any country to Antarctica. The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959 by 47 states, provides a legal framework for managing Antarctica. States establish research stations there for scientific investigations, but no military activities are permitted.

As for the Arctic, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea permitted countries to submit claims to the Arctic Circle by 2009 (Figure 8-9). The Arctic region is thought to be rich in energy resources.

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**FIGURE 8.7 WESTERN SAHARA** Morocco built sand walls during the 1970s to isolate Polisario Front rebels fighting for independence.

**FIGURE 8.8 NATIONAL CLAIMS TO ANTARCTICA** Antarctica is the only large landmass in the world that is not part of a sovereign state. It comprises 14 million square kilometers (5.4 million square miles), which makes it 50 percent larger than Canada. Portions are claimed by Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom; claims by Argentina, Chile, and the United Kingdom are conflicting.

**FIGURE 8.9 NATIONAL CLAIMS TO THE ARCTIC** Under the Law of the Sea Treaty of 1982, countries had until 2009 to submit claims to territory inside the Arctic Circle. Some of these claims overlap.
Development of the State Concept

Learning Outcome 8.1.3
Explain the concept of nation-state and how it differs from earlier ways to govern.

The concept of dividing the world into a collection of independent states is recent. Prior to the 1800s, Earth's surface was organized in other ways, such as into city-states, empires, kingdoms, and small land areas controlled by a hereditary class of nobles, and much of it consisted of unorganized territory.

ANCIENT STATES

The development of states can be traced to the ancient Middle East, in an area known as the Fertile Crescent. The ancient Fertile Crescent formed an arc between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 8-10). The eastern end, Mesopotamia, was centered in the valley formed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in present-day Iraq. The Fertile Crescent then curved westward over the desert, turning southward to encompass the Mediterranean coast through present-day Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The Nile River valley of Egypt is sometimes regarded as an extension of the Fertile Crescent. Situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Fertile Crescent was a center for land and sea communications in ancient times.

The first states to evolve in Mesopotamia were known as city-states. A city-state is a sovereign state that comprises a town and the surrounding countryside. Walls clearly delimited the boundaries of the city, and outside the walls the city controlled agricultural land to produce food for urban residents. The countryside also provided the city with an outer line of defense against attack by other city-states. Periodically, one city or tribe in Mesopotamia would gain military dominance over the others and form an empire. Mesopotamia was organized into a succession of empires by the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians.

Pause and Reflect 8.1.3
What is the importance of the Fertile Crescent in the development of religions, as discussed in Chapter 6? How do you think the development of ancient states and religions in the region are related?

MEDIEVAL STATES

Political unity in the ancient world reached its height with the establishment of the Roman Empire, which controlled most of Europe, North Africa, and Southwest Asia, from modern-day Spain to Iran and from Egypt to England (Figure 8-11). At its maximum extent, the empire comprised 38 provinces, each using the same set of laws that had been created in Rome. Massive walls helped the Roman army defend many of the empire's frontiers.

The Roman Empire collapsed in the fifth century, after a series of attacks by people living on its frontiers and because of internal disputes. The European portion of the Roman Empire was fragmented into a large number of estates owned by competing kings, dukes, barons, and other nobles.

A handful of powerful kings emerged as rulers over large numbers of these European estates beginning about the year 1100. The consolidation of neighboring estates under the unified control of a king formed the basis for the development of such modern European states as England, France, and Spain (Figure 8-12). Much of Europe consolidated into a handful of empires, including Austrian, French, Ottoman, and Russian (Figure 8-13, top).
NATION-STATES IN EUROPE

To preserve and enhance distinctive cultural characteristics, ethnicities seek to govern themselves without interference. A nation-state is a state whose territory corresponds to that occupied by a particular ethnicity. Ethnic groups have pushed to create nation-states because desire for self-rule is a very important shared attitude for many of them. The concept that ethnicities have the right to govern themselves is known as self-determination.

Some ethnicities were able to form nation-states in Europe during the nineteenth century, and by the early twentieth century most of Western Europe was made up of nation-states (Figure 8-13, bottom).

The movement to identify nationalities on the basis of language spread elsewhere in Europe during the twentieth century. After World War I, leaders of the victorious countries met at the Versailles Peace Conference to redraw the map of Europe. One of the chief advisers to President Woodrow Wilson, the geographer Isaiah Bowman, played a major role in the decisions. Language was the most important criterion the Allied leaders used to create new states in Europe and to adjust the boundaries of existing ones.

During the 1930s, German National Socialists (Nazis) claimed that all German-speaking parts of Europe constituted one nationality and should be unified into one state. After it was defeated in World War II, Germany was divided into two countries (refer ahead to Figure 8-43). Two Germanys existed from 1949 until 1990.

With the end of communism, the German Democratic Republic ceased to exist, and its territory became part of the German Federal Republic. The present-day state of Germany, though, bears little resemblance to the territory occupied by German-speaking people prior to the upheaval of the twentieth century.