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 among them.

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-18th 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 are 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.

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 38th 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 17th parallel to separate the North, controlled from Hanoi, from the South, controlled from Saigon.

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**."

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:*

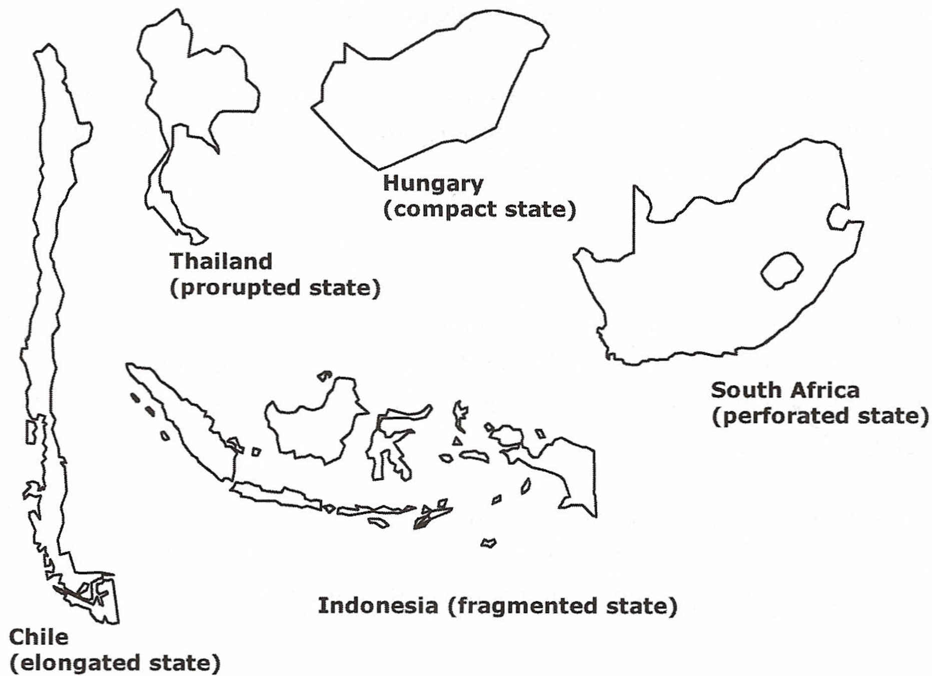
1) **compact states** – In a compact state, the distance from the center to any boundary is about the same, giving it a shape similar to a circle. If the capital is in the center, then the geographical location eases its ability to rule. Compactness also promotes good communications among all regions.

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. It is easy for an elongated state to 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 exclave of Armenian Christians that 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 Morino, 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

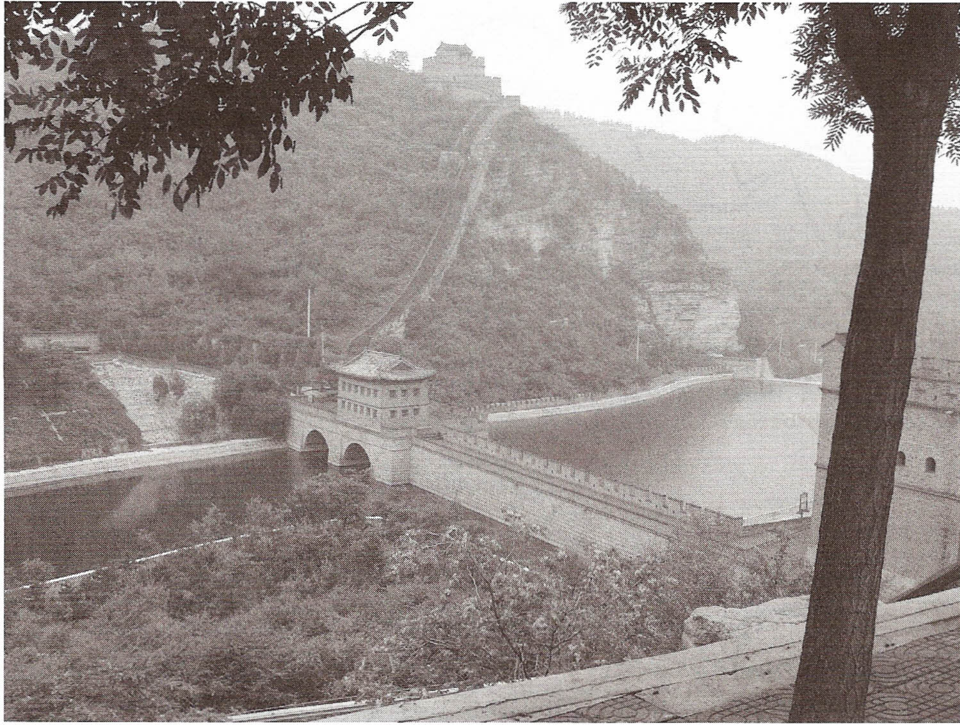
Liechtenstein is one of the world's smallest states, called a "microstate." It only encompasses a few square miles, and is tucked in between two relatively small states, Switzerland and Austria.

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. 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 19th-century war in which Bolivia lost its access to the ocean.

Sometimes a good relative location is an important asset of 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.

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



The Great Wall. The Great Wall as we see it today was built during the Ming Dynasty that ruled from the 13th to 17th centuries C.E. A much earlier wall was built starting in the 3rd 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.

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 20th 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 in the early 19th 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 13th 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.

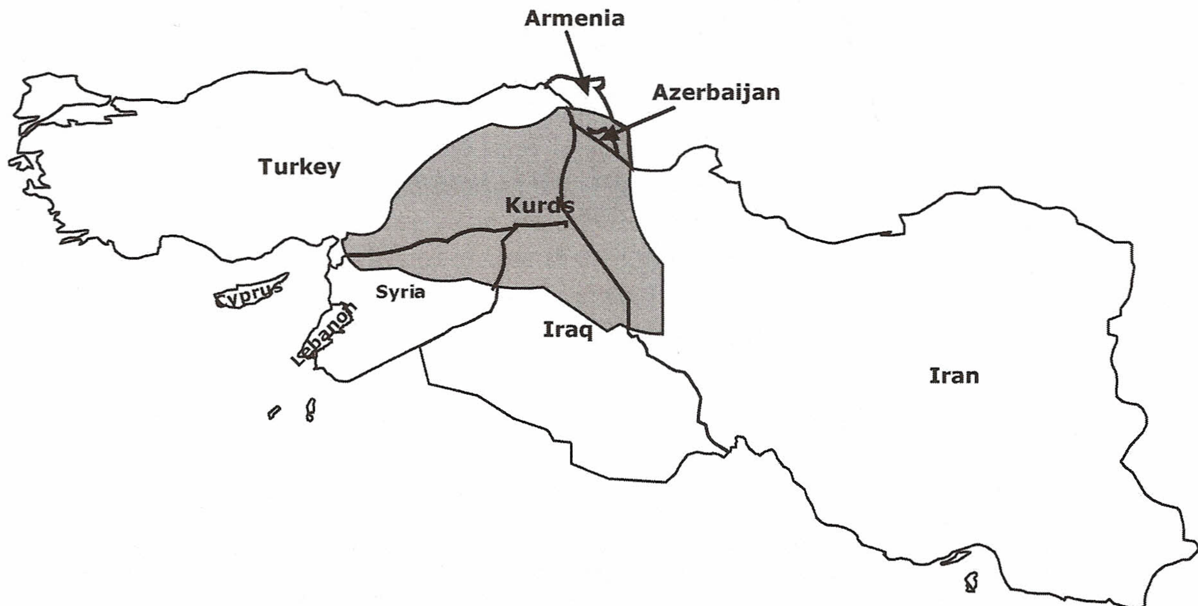
States today do much more than keep order in society. Many have important institutions that promote general welfare – such as health, safe transportation, and effective communication systems – and economic stability. The concept of state is closely related to a **nation,** a group of people that is bound 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.

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.

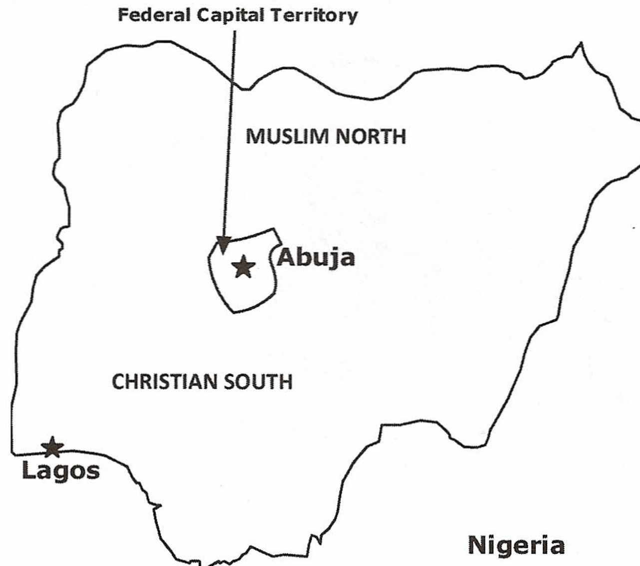


A Stateless Nation. The Kurds have had a national identity for many centuries, but they have never had a state. Instead, 20 million Kurds are spread in an area that crosses the formal borders of six countries: Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

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 move 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 its 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, Eldrige Gerry, who in the early 19th 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 12th district to redraw their 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 can help reinforce a sense of regionalism and can shape a government's response to issues in the future.

COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM

18th 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 19th century. European expansion during the 17th, 18th, and 19th 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 19th and early 20th 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 since the middle of the 20th 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, their number had only increased to about 70. Since 1945, the numbers have 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.

Former Soviet States in Central Asia. Until 1991 states like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan were part of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union fell apart, 15 independent nation-states were created.

Today many of the world's countries have relatively small populations, with about 90 countries having populations under 5 million, and 33 with fewer than a half-million people.

FEDERAL AND UNITARY STATES

A well-integrated state consists of a stable, clearly bounded territory, served by well-developed institutions, an effective administrative framework, a productive core area, and an influential capital city. All states, however, face challenges, and their internal organizations can determine how successfully they deal with their problems.

Every state has multiple levels of authority, though the geographic distribution of power varies widely. States may be categorized into three types according to their internal geographic distribution of power:

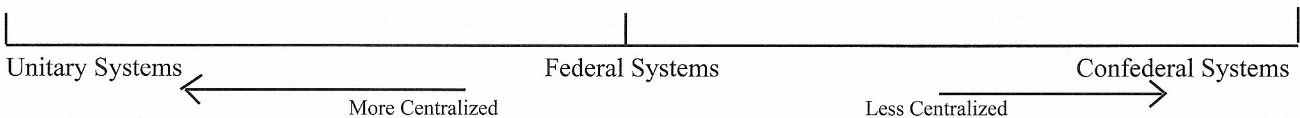
1) A **unitary system** is one that concentrates all policy-making powers in one central geographic place. When the nation-state evolved in Europe, democracy had not yet developed, and governments ruled by force. Most European governments were highly centralized; the capital city represented authority that stretched to the limits of the state. Even though local governments developed, they had no separate powers, and most of the states were and still are relatively small in land space. As a result, most European governments today remain unitary states.

2) A **confederal system** spreads the power among many sub-units (such as states), and has a weak central government. Most attempts at confederal systems have not been long-lasting, although the modern government of Switzerland has very strong sub-governments, and comes as close to a modern confederation as exists. Examples of failed confederations are the United States government under the Articles of Confederation (1781-1789) and the Confederate States of America that consisted of the southern states of the United States during the Civil War (1861-1865).

3) A **federal system** divides the power between the central government and the sub-units. These developed in several colonial areas, including the United States, Canada, and Australia. Federal systems were possible because the cultures were new, no single cities dominated the new

countries, and in all three examples the land space is large, setting the stage for the development of regional governments. Federalism accommodates regional interests by allowing for diverse needs and preferences, but also features a central government that is strong enough to keep the countries from falling apart.

All political systems today fall on a continuum from the most concentrated amount of power to the least. Unitary governments may be placed on the left side, according to the degree of concentration; confederal governments are placed to the right; and federal governments fall in between. Most countries have unitary systems, although some are experimenting with **devolution**, or the transfer of some important powers from central governments to sub-governments.



MODERN CHALLENGES TO THE NATION-STATE CONFIGURATION

Nation-states have always had their challenges, both internal and external, but today new supranational forces are at work that have led some to believe that the nation-state political configuration itself may be changing. Is it possible that large regional organizations, such as the European Union, will replace the smaller state units as basic organizational models? Or will international organizations, such as the United Nations, come to have true governing power over the nation-states? If so, then the very nature of sovereignty may be changing, especially if nation-states of the future have to abide by the rules of **supranational organizations** (cooperating groups of nations that operate on either a regional or international level) for all major decisions and rules.

CENTRIPETAL V. CENTRIFUGAL FORCES

A recurring set of forces affects all nation-states: **centripetal forces** that unify them, and **centrifugal forces** that tend to fragment them.

- **Centripetal forces** bind together the people of a state, giving it strength. One of the most powerful centripetal forces is **nationalism**, or identities based on nationhood. It encourages allegiance to a single country, and it promotes loyalty and commitment. Such emotions encourage people to obey the law and accept the country's overall ideologies. States promote nationalism in a number of ways, including the use of symbols, such as flags, rituals, and holidays that remind citizens of what the country stands for. Even when a society is highly heterogeneous, symbols are powerful tools for creating national unity. Institutions, such as schools, the armed forces, and religion, may also serve as centripetal forces. Schools are expected to instill the society's beliefs, values, and behaviors in the young, teach the nation's language, and encourage students to identify with the nation. Fast and efficient transportation and communication systems also tend to unify nations. National broadcasting companies usually take on the point of view of the nation, even if they broadcast internationally. Transportation systems make it easier for people to travel to other parts of the country, and give the government the ability to reach all of its citizens.

- **Centrifugal forces** oppose centripetal forces. They destabilize the government and encourage the country to fall apart. A country that is not well-organized or governed stands to lose the loyalty of its citizens, and weak institutions can fail to provide the cohesive support that the government needs. Strong institutions may also challenge the government for the loyalty of the people. For example, when the U.S.S.R. was created in 1917, its leaders grounded the new country in the ideology of communism. To strengthen the state, they forbid the practice of the traditional religion, Russian Orthodoxy. Although church membership dropped dramatically, the religious institution never disappeared, and when the U.S.S.R. dissolved, the church reappeared and is regaining its strength today. The church was a centrifugal force in creating and maintaining loyalty to the communist state. Nationalism, too, can be a destabilizing force, especially if different ethnic groups within the country have more loyalty to their ethnicity than to the state and its government. These loyalties can lead to **separatist movements** in which nationalities within a country may demand independence. Such movements served as centrifugal forces for the Soviet Union as various nationalities – Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Latvians, Georgians, and Armenians – challenged the government for their independence. Other examples are the Basques of Northern Spain, who have different customs (including language) from others in the country, and the Tamils in Sri Lanka, who have waged years of guerrilla warfare to defend what they see as majority threats to their culture, rights, and property. Characteristics that encourage separatist movements are a peripheral location and social and economic inequality. One reaction states have had to centrifugal force is **devolution**, or the decentralization of decision-making to regional governments. Britain has devolved power to the Scottish and Welsh parliaments in an effort to keep peace with Scotland and Wales. As a result, Britain's unitary government has taken some significant strides toward federalism, although London is still the geographic center of decision-making for the country.

DEVOLUTION: ETHNIC, ECONOMIC AND SPATIAL FORCES

Devolution of government powers to sub-governments is usually a reaction to centrifugal forces – those that divide and destabilize. Devolutionary forces can emerge in all kinds of states, old and new, mature and newly created. We may divide these forces into three basic types:

1) **Ethnic forces** – An **ethnic group** shares a well-developed sense of belonging to the same culture. That identity is based on a unique mixture of language, religion, and customs. If a state contains strong ethnic groups with identities that differ from those of the majority, it can threaten the territorial integrity of the state itself. **Ethnonationalism** – the tendency for an ethnic group to see itself as a distinct nation with a right to autonomy or independence – is a fundamental centrifugal force promoting devolution. The threat is usually stronger if the group is clustered in particular geographic spaces within the nation-state. For example, most French Canadians live in the province of Quebec, creating a large base for an independence movement. If ethnically French people were scattered evenly over the country, their sense of identity would be diluted, and the devolutionary force would most likely be weaker. Devolutionary forces in Britain – centered in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland – have not been strong enough to destabilize the country, although violence in Northern Ireland has certainly destabilized the region. Political boundaries were rearranged on the Indian subcontinent to separate Hindus

and Muslims, resulting in the creation of the country of Pakistan. Ethnic forces broke up the nation-state of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, devolving it into the separate states of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Serbia-Montenegro. Canada responded to pressures for a homeland for native Inuit by the 1999 creation of Nunavut as a separate territory, redrawing Canada's political borders for the first time since 1925.

2) **Economic forces** – Economic inequalities may also destabilize a nation-state, particularly if the inequalities are regional. For example, Italy is split between north and south by the "Ancona Line", an invisible line extending from Rome to the Adriatic coast at Ancona. The north is far more prosperous than the south, with the north clearly part of the European core area, and the south a part of the periphery. The north is industrialized, and the south is rural. These economic differences inspired the formation of the Northern League, which advocated an independent state called Padania that would shed the north of the "economic drag" they considered the south to be. The movement failed, but it did encourage the Italian government to devolve power to regional governments, moving it toward a more federal system. A similar economic force is at work in Catalonia in northern Spain, with Catalonians only about 17% of Spain's population, but accountable for 40% of all Spanish industrial exports.

Economic Devolutionary Forces in Italy and Spain. Geographically, southern Italy and most of Spain lie outside the European core, creating economic devolutionary forces within the two nation-states. In Spain, the Catalonians in the north are connected to the core, but the bulk of Spain is not. In Italy the core extends its reach over the northern half of the country, creating centrifugal tensions between north and south.

3) **Spatial forces** – Spatially, devolutionary events most often occur on the margins of the state. Distance, remoteness, and peripheral location promote devolution, especially if water, desert, or mountains separate the areas from the center of power, and neighbor nations that may support separatist objectives. For example, the United States claims Puerto Rico as a territory, and has offered it recognition as a state. However, Puerto Ricans have consistently voted down the offer of statehood, and a small but vocal pro-independence movement has advocated complete separation from the U.S. The movement is encouraged by spatial forces – Puerto Rico is an island in the Caribbean, close to other islands that have their independence.

CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL CONCERNS

Geopolitics is the study of the spatial and territorial dimensions of power relationships within the global political-territorial order. This approach was taken by geographer **Friedrich Ratzel** in the 19th century, when he theorized that a state compares to a biological organism with a life cycle from birth to death, with a predictable rise and fall of power. The field became controversial after Adolf Hitler used this principle to justify the growth of the German state through attacking weaker states around him and aggressively promoting German nationalism. Meanwhile, a British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, concerned himself with power relationships surrounding Britain's global empire. Naval power was responsible for British power, but Mackinder believed that a land-based power, not a sea power, would ultimately rule the world. His **heartland theory** stated that the "pivot area" of the earth – Eurasia – holds the resources, both natural and human, to dominate the globe. When the Soviet Union emerged as a super power after World War II, the heartland theory attracted a great deal of support.

The rimland theory challenged the heartland theory in Nicholas Spykman's book *The Geography of Peace*, written in 1944. Spykman argued that the Eurasian rim, not its heart, held the key to global power. What is the rimland? It is a large swath of land that encircles the heartland, roughly touching oceans and seas. It includes China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, India, the Arabian Peninsula, and Europe. This area is unlikely to fall under any one superpower's control, an important key to keeping a global, geopolitical balance of power.

In recent years, with ever-increasing globalization, geopolitics have reinvigorated, especially as they were dominated from 1945 to 1991 by the **Cold War**, the competition between two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – for control of land spaces all over the world. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. was left as the only superpower, but in a world rapidly being redefined. Not only does Russia remain a force to contend with today, China is becoming an economic powerhouse that increasingly seeks participation in world trade and politics. Europe has united in an economic union that is developing more political bonds that may well foresee a new world order of supranational organizations that will challenge the sovereignty of the nation-state.

SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: CHANGING THE MEANING OF SOVEREIGNTY

Supranational organizations have been around for some time now, but their nature is changing, with some real implications for the sovereignty of individual nation-states. Several countries formed the Concert of Europe in the early 19th century in an effort to restore balance of power after the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was a voluntary agreement, and it did not prevent the outbreak of several limited wars. However, many scholars believe that the effort to balance power that the agreement sparked was at least

partly responsible for the relative peace among quarrelsome European neighbors until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. That war stimulated another more global effort to form a lasting international organization, and resulted in the creation of the League of Nations, whose fate was doomed with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Even before the United States joined the war, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed to try again when the war ended. In this spirit the United Nations was formed in 1945.

The United Nations

Only 49 nation-states signed the original charter of the United Nations in 1945, but because many new nations have been created since then, the membership of the U.N. has grown to 192 members by 2009. It has lasted for more than 60 years, and its membership makes it a truly global organization. Membership in the U.N. is voluntary, but it has some limited powers to force its members to abide by the organization's peacekeeping principles. As a result, it plays an important role in geopolitics, and changes the dynamics of international relationships from the previous almost exclusive focus on nation-states as individual actors on the world stage. The U.N. changes the nature of sovereignty by applying the concept to an organization with collective membership, not just to individual nation-states.

An important power of the U.N. is that its members can vote to establish a peacekeeping force in a "hotspot" and request states to contribute military forces. The body responsible for making this decision is the **Security Council**, and any one of its five permanent members (the U.S., Britain, France, China, and Russia) may veto a proposed peacekeeping action. During the era of the Cold War, the Security Council was often in gridlock because the U.S. and Russia almost always disagreed. Today that gridlock is broken, but it is still difficult for all five countries to agree on a single course of action. Peacekeeping forces have been sent to separate warring forces in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The U.N. forces are supposed to remain neutral, and they usually have restrictions on their rights to use weapons against either side in a dispute. Despite its limitations, the United Nations is a forum where most of the states of the world can meet and vote on issues without resorting to war.

The U.N. is an umbrella organization that includes many sub-organizations that promote the general welfare of the world's citizens and monitor and aid world trade and other economic contacts. These efforts are funded by membership dues, and represent an extension of international cooperation into areas other than peacekeeping. Examples of such organizations are the World Bank, the International Court of Justice, and UNESCO (an economic and social council).

Regional Organizations

During the Cold War era, regional military alliances appeared, and countries joined them based on their affiliation either with the United States or Russia. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formed in the late 1940s with 14 European members, the United States, and Canada. An opposing alliance – the Warsaw Pact – began in 1955 that was composed of the Soviet Union and six Eastern European countries. Together the two organizations were designed to maintain a bipolar balance of power in Europe. The Warsaw Pact disbanded with the breakup of the Soviet Union, and NATO expanded to include many of its former members. Other regional organizations include the Organization of American States (OAS) created to promote social, cultural, political, and economic links among member states; the Arab League founded to promote the interests and sovereignty of countries in the Middle East; and

the Organization for African Unity (OAU) that has promoted the elimination of minority white-ruled governments in southern Africa.

The European Union

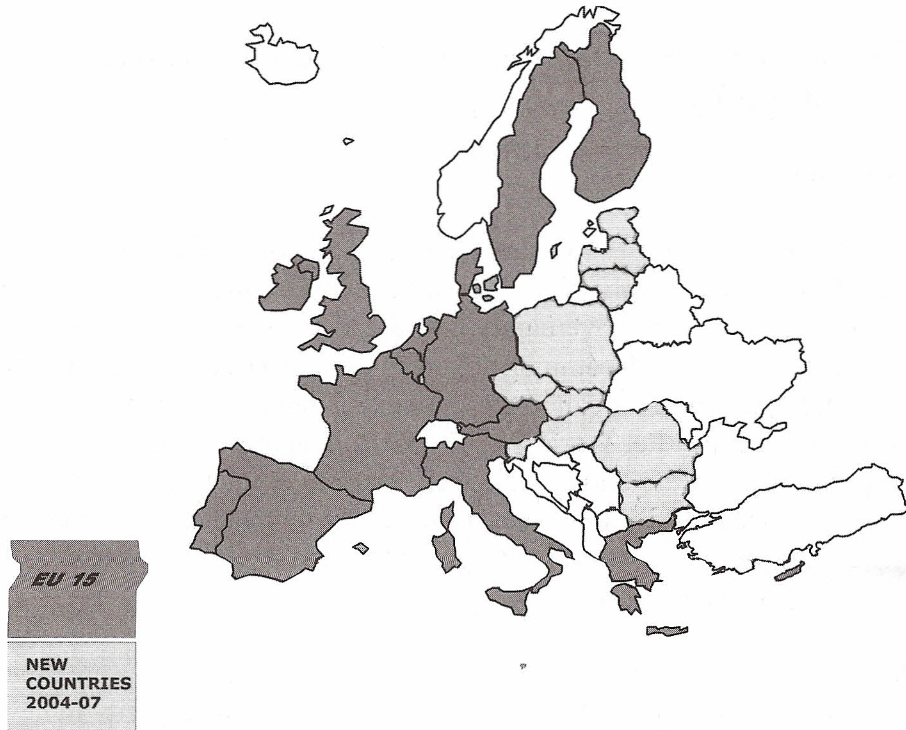
A regional organization that promises to redefine the meaning of sovereignty is the **European Union.** All the countries of Europe are deeply affected by a trend toward **integration.** Integration is a process that encourages states to pool their sovereignty in order to gain political, economic, and social clout. Integration binds states together with common policies and shared rules. The supranational organization that integrates the states of Europe is called the European Union. The organization began in an effort to revitalize a war-torn Europe after World War II ended. The most immediate need was to repair the nations' broken economies, so the initial goals were almost completely economic in intent. In 1949 the Council of Europe, which had little power, formed to provide an opportunity for national leaders to meet. The following year a supranational authority was formed to coordinate the coal and steel industries, both damaged heavily during the war.

The organization went through several name changes, but until 1991 its goals were exclusively economic. The Maastricht Treaty created the modern organization, and gave it authority in new areas, including monetary policy, foreign affairs, national security, transportation, the environment, justice, and tourism. The treaty established the **three pillars,** or spheres of authority:

1. Trade and other economic matters, including economic and monetary union into a single currency, and the creation of the European Central Bank
2. Justice and home affairs, including policy governing asylum, border crossing, immigration, and judicial cooperation on crime and terrorism
3. Common foreign and security policy, including joint positions and actions, and common defense policy

The EU has made remarkable strides in its ability to set European **monetary policy,** or the control of the money supply. Today the euro has replaced the old national currencies, which are well on their way to being phased out. Also, the power to set basic interest rates and other fiscal policies is being passed from national banks and governments to the **European Monetary Union** and its new central bank. Today, in 12 of the member countries, the euro is accepted as a common currency both in banking and for everyday business transactions. Two exceptions to the rule are Britain and Sweden, which as of 2008 still refuse to give up their nation currencies in favor of a common European currency.

Even though the political and economic muscle of so many countries united is considerable, this rapid integration presents many difficult issues for the EU. First, organizational issues abound. Structures that work for six countries do not necessarily operate smoothly for 27. Second, the expansion brings in many former communist countries whose economies were relatively weak by the end of the 20th century. Older member states worry that immigrants from the east will flood their labor markets and strain their economies. EU supporters believe that these problems will be overshadowed by the benefits of common markets, currencies, political policies, and defense. Recently, the organization has attempted to pass a **European Constitution**, which if successful would mark an important recognition of the EU's sovereignty. However, two countries – France and the Netherlands – voted the constitution down in popular referenda in 2005 – in a double show confirming the continuing importance of nationalism.



The European Union. Ongoing expansion is a major characteristic of the European Union, with a total membership of 27 countries as of 2009. The European Union began with six members in 1957: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Denmark, Great Britain, and Ireland joined in the early 1970s; Greece in 1981; Portugal and Spain in 1986; and Austria, Finland, and Sweden in 1995. Ten countries joined on May 2, 2004: Cyprus (Greek part), the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania joined on January 1, 2007.

After the negative votes, seven other countries decided to postpone their referenda. In June 2007 the European Council decided to start negotiations on a Reform Treaty as a replacement.

FORCES OF CHANGE: GLOBALIZATION, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND RELIGIOUS POLITICS

In considering the changing political imprint on the earth's surface, it is important to take notice of overall patterns of development that affect everyone in the contemporary world. Two of these trends – democratization and the move toward market economies – indicate growing commonalities among nations, or the forces of **globalization.** The third represents fragmentation – the revival of ethnic or cultural politics.

1) Democratization

Even though democracy takes many different forms, more and more nations are turning toward some form of popular government. One broad, essential requirement for democracy is the existence of competitive elections that are regular, free, and fair. In other words, the election offers a real possibility that the incumbent government may be defeated. By this standard, a number of modern states that call themselves "democracies" fall into a gray area that is neither clearly democratic nor clearly undemocratic. Examples are Russia, Nigeria, and Indonesia. In contrast, liberal democracies display other democratic characteristics beyond having competitive elections:

- Civil liberties, such as freedom of belief, speech, and assembly
- Rule of law that provides for equal treatment of citizens and due process
- Neutrality of the judiciary and other checks on the abuse of power
- Open civil society that allows citizens to lead private lives and mass media to operate independently from government
- Civilian control of the military that restricts the likelihood of the military seizing control of the government

Countries that have regular, free, and fair competitive elections, but are missing these other qualities (civil liberties, rule of law, neutrality of the judiciary, open civil society, and civilian control of the military) are referred to as illiberal democracies.

According to political scientist Samuel Huntington, the modern world is now in a **"third wave" of democratization** that began during the 1970s. The "first wave" developed gradually over time; the "second wave" occurred after the Allied victory in World War II, and continued until the early 1960s. This second wave was characterized by de-colonization around the globe. The third wave is characterized by the defeat of dictatorial or totalitarian rulers from South America to Eastern Europe to some parts of Africa. The recent political turnover in Mexico may be interpreted as part of this "third wave" of democratization.

Why has democratization occurred? According to Huntington, some factors are:

- The loss of legitimacy by both right and left wing authoritarian regimes
- The expansion of an urban middle class in developing countries
- A new emphasis on "human rights" by the United States and the European Union
- The "snowball" effect has been important: when one country in a region becomes democratic, it influences others to do so. An example is Poland's influence on other nations of Eastern Europe during the 1980s.

One of the greatest obstacles to democratization is poverty because it blocks citizen participation in government. Huntington gauges democratic stability by this standard: democracy may be declared when a country has had at least two successive peaceful turnovers of power.

2) Movement Toward Market Economies

Many political economists today declare that the economic competition between capitalism and socialism that dominated the 20th century is now a part of the past. The old **command economies**, with socialist principles of centralized planning and state ownership are fading from existence, except in combination with market economies. The issue now is what type of **market economy** will be most successful: one that allows for significant control from the central government – a "**mixed economy**" – or one that does not – a pure market economy. For example, modern Germany has a "social market economy" that is team-oriented and emphasizes cooperation between management and organized labor. In contrast, the United States economy tends to be more individualistic and anti-government control.

Marketization is the term that describes the state's re-creation of a market in which property, labor, goods, and services can all function in a competitive environment to determine their value. **Privatization** is the

transfer of state-owned property to private ownership. Because central political control of economies waned during the 20th century, some have speculated that market economies promote the move toward democratization of political institutions. However, both China and Russia have developed capitalist economies in recent years, but their governments have remained highly authoritarian in nature.

3) Revival of Ethnic or Cultural Politics

Until recently, few political scientists predicted that **fragmentation** – divisions based on ethnic or cultural identity – would become increasingly important in world politics. A few years ago **nationalism** – identities based on nationhood – seemed to be declining in favor of increasing globalization. However, nationality questions almost certainly blocked Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to resuscitate the Soviet Union, and national identities remain strong in most parts of the world. Perhaps most dramatically, the **politicization of religion** (the use of religious principles to promote political ends and vice versa) has dominated world politics of the early 21st century. Most Westerners have been caught off guard by this turn of events, especially in the United States, where separation of church and state has been a basic political principle since the founding of the country.

Samuel Huntington argues that our most important and dangerous future conflicts will be based on clashes of civilizations, not on socioeconomic or even ideological differences. He divides the world into several different cultural areas that may already be poised to threaten world peace: the West, the Orthodox world (Russia), Islamic countries, Latin American, Africa, the Hindu world, the Confucian world, the Buddhist world, and Japan. Some political scientists criticize Huntington by saying that he distorts cultural divisions and that he underestimates the importance of cultural conflicts within nations. In either case – a world divided into cultural regions or a world organized into multicultural nations – the revival of ethnic or cultural politics tends to emphasize differences among nations rather than commonalities.

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Balkanization
binational or multinational state
boundary
centripetal force, centrifugal force
Cold War
colonies
command economy
compact states
confederal system
consequent boundaries
core area
core-periphery
cultural boundary
democratization
devolution
disputes: positional, territorial, resource, functional
economic force
electoral geography