

Introducing Political Geography

When looking at satellite images of Earth, we easily distinguish *places*—landmasses and water bodies, mountains and rivers, deserts and fertile agricultural land, urban areas and forests. What we cannot see are where boundaries are located between countries.

To many, national boundaries are more meaningful than natural features. One of Earth's most fundamental cultural characteristics—one that we take for granted—is the division of our planet's surface into a collection of *spaces* occupied by individual countries.

During the Cold War (the late 1940s until the early 1990s), two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—essentially “ruled” the world. As superpowers, they competed at a global *scale*. Many countries belonged to one of two *regions*, one allied with the former Soviet Union and the other allied with the United States.

With the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the global political landscape changed fundamentally. In the post-Cold War era, the familiar division of the world into countries or states is crumbling. The United States is less dominant in the political landscape of the twenty-first century, and the Soviet Union no longer exists.

Wars have broken out in recent years—both between small neighboring states and among cultural groups within countries—over political control of territory. Old countries have been broken up into collections of smaller ones, some barely visible on world maps (Figure 8-1).

Geographic concepts help us to understand the altered political organization of Earth's surface. Geographers observe why this familiar division of the world is changing. We can also use geographic methods to examine the causes of political change and instability and to anticipate potential trouble spots around the world.

Today, globalization means more *connections* among states. Individual countries have transferred military, economic, and political authority to regional and worldwide collections of states. Power is exercised through connections among states created primarily for economic cooperation.

Despite (or perhaps because of) greater global political cooperation, local diversity has increased in political affairs, as individual cultural groups have demanded more control over the territory they inhabit. States have transferred power to local governments, but this has not placated cultural groups that seek complete independence.



▲ FIGURE 8-1 TUVALU The island of Tuvalu, with 10,000 inhabitants, became an independent country in 1978. It is the world's fourth-smallest country.

No one can predict where the next war or terrorist attack will erupt, but political geography helps to explain the cultural and physical factors that underlie political unrest in the world. Political geographers study how people have organized Earth's land surface into countries and alliances, reasons underlying the observed arrangements, and the conflicts that result from the organization.

- **KEY ISSUE 1** describes *where* states are distributed. Nearly the entire land area of the world is divided into states, although what constitutes a state is not always clear-cut.
- **KEY ISSUE 2** explains *why* states can be difficult to create. *Local diversity* has increased in political affairs, as individual cultural groups have demanded more control over the territory they inhabit.
- **KEY ISSUE 3** looks at boundaries between states and within states. Boundary lines are not painted on Earth, but they might as well be, for these national divisions are very real.
- **KEY ISSUE 4** discusses competition and cooperation among states. Political conflicts during the twentieth century were dominated by the *globalization* of warfare, including two world wars involving most of the world's states and collections of allied states. Into the twenty-first century, the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, were initiated not by a hostile state but by a terrorist organization.

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.

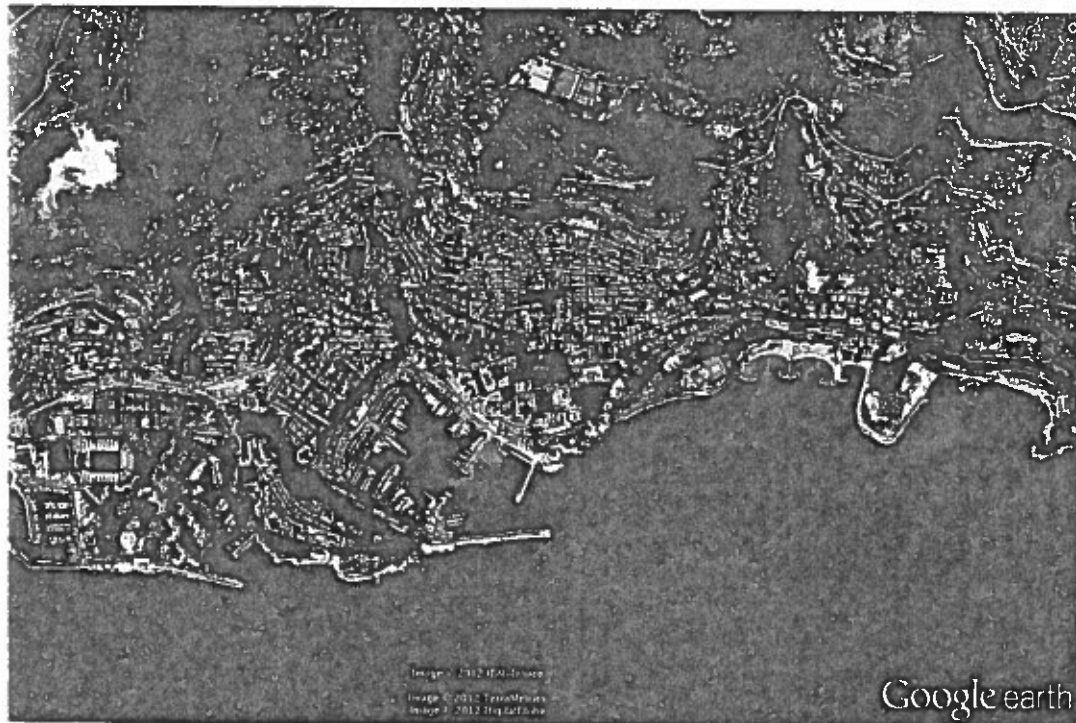
How many of these states can you name? Old-style geography sometimes required memorization of countries

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**
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.

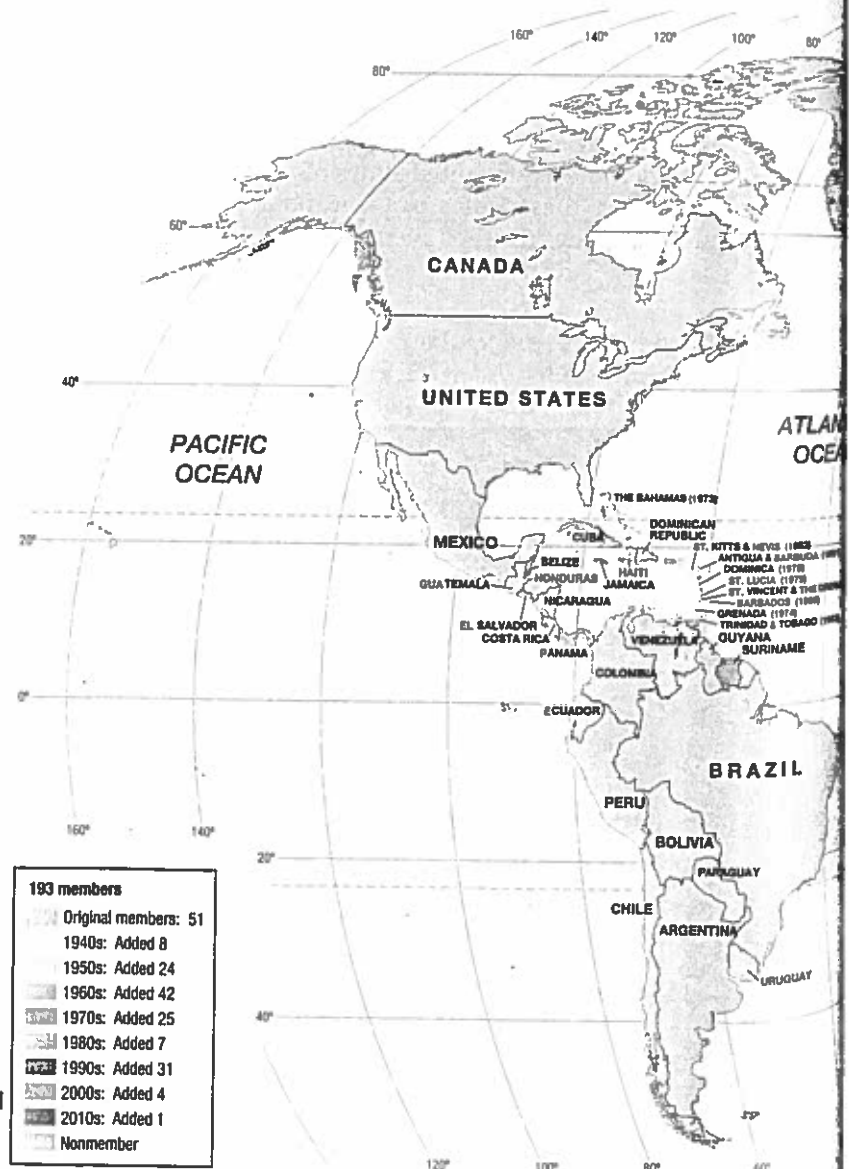
When it was organized in 1945, the UN had only 51 members, including 49 sovereign states plus Byelorussia (now Belarus) and Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union (Figure 8-3). The number of UN members reached 193 in 2011.

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. By 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 Nearly the entire land area of the world part of the UN.

Challenges in Defining States

Learning Outcome 8.1.2

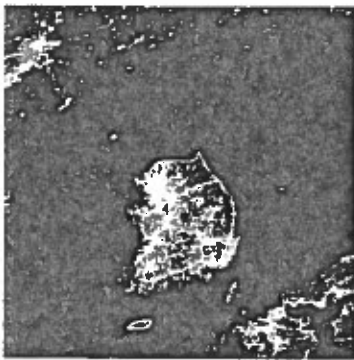
Explain why it is difficult to determine whether some territories are states.

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 into 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



▲ **FIGURE 8-5 NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA** A nighttime satellite image recorded by the U.S. Air Force Defense Meteorological Satellite Program shows the illumination of electric lights in South Korea, whereas North Korea has virtually no electric lights, a measure of its poverty and limited economic activity.

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

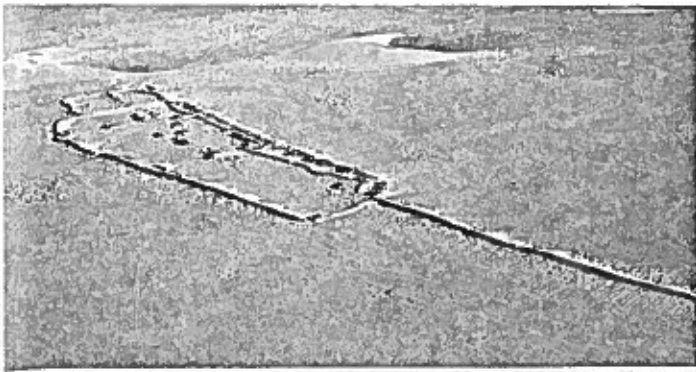
Taiwan (officially the Republic of China) as separate and sovereign states. According to China's government, Taiwan is not sovereign but a part of China. This confusing situation arose from a civil war in China during the late 1940s between the Nationalists and the Communists. After losing in 1949, Nationalist 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 1999 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.



▲ **FIGURE 8-6 TAIWAN** Taiwanese wave flags at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei, Taiwan. The hall is named for the last Nationalist president of mainland China.



▲ FIGURE 8-7 WESTERN SAHARA Morocco built sand walls during the 1980s to isolate Polisario Front rebels fighting for independence.

WESTERN SAHARA (SAHRAWI REPUBLIC)

The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, also known as Western Sahara, is considered by most African countries as a sovereign state. Morocco, however, claims the territory and to prove 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 west 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, but 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 deserts, 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

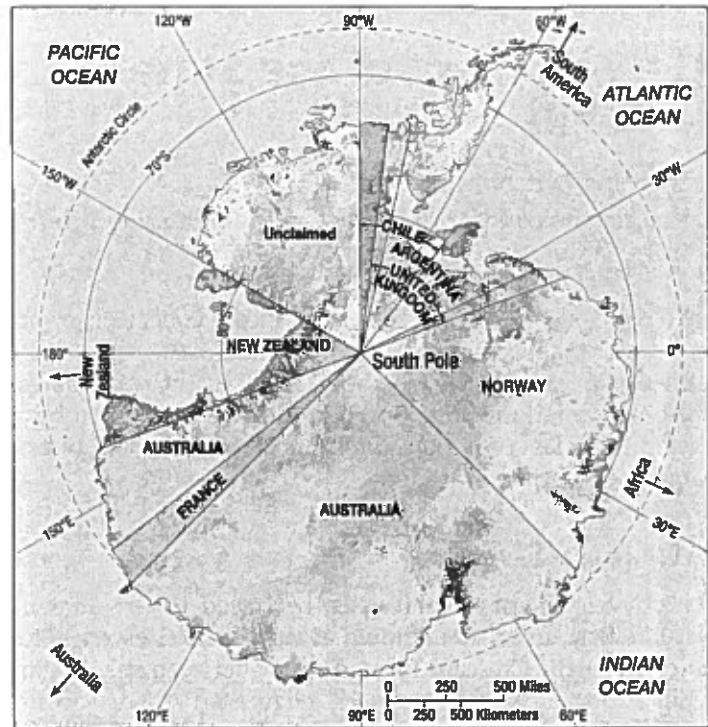
The South Pole region contains the only large landmasses on Earth's surface that are not part of a state. Several states claim portions of the region, and some claims are overlapping and conflicting.

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 may establish research stations there for scientific investigations, but no military activities are permitted.

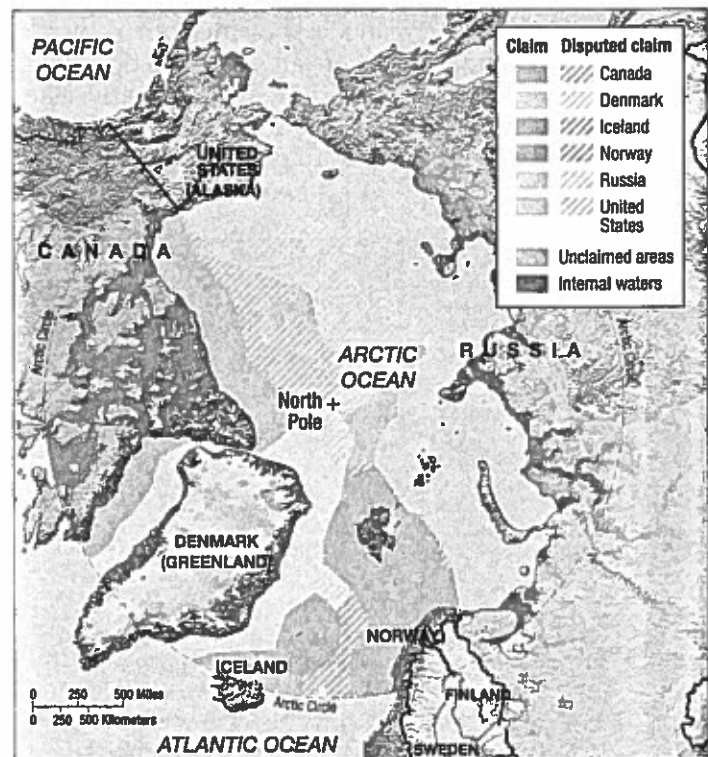
As for the Arctic, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea permitted countries to submit claims inside the Arctic Circle by 2009 (Figure 8-9). The Arctic region is thought to be rich in energy resources.

Pause and Reflect 8.1.2

The polar ice caps are receding with the warming of Earth. How might this affect competing territorial claims?



▲ 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

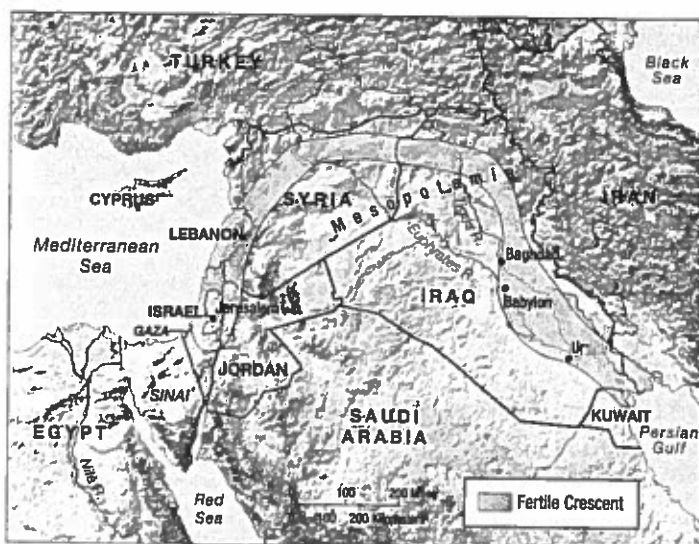
Explain the concept of nation-state and how it differs from earlier ways to govern.

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 delineated 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



▲ FIGURE 8-10 THE FERTILE CRESCENT The crescent-shaped area of relatively fertile land was organized into a succession of empires starting several thousand years ago.

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).



▲ FIGURE 8-11 ROMAN EMPIRE, A.D. 100 At its height, the Roman Empire controlled much of Europe and Southwest Asia & North Africa.



▲ FIGURE 8-12 EUROPE, 1300 Much of Europe was fragmented into small states controlled by nobles.



▲ FIGURE 8-13 NATION-STATES IN EUROPE, 1800 AND 1924 (Top) In 1800, much of Europe was organized into empires. (bottom) After World War I, much of Europe was organized into nation-states.

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 upheavals of the twentieth century.

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 1

Where Are States Distributed?

- ✓ The world is divided into approximately 200 states, all but a handful of which are members of the United Nations.
- ✓ It is not always clear-cut whether a territory can be defined as a single state.
- ✓ Organizing Earth into nation-states is a recent concept; other methods of controlling territory prevailed in the past.