

Topic 4.1

Introduction to Political Geography

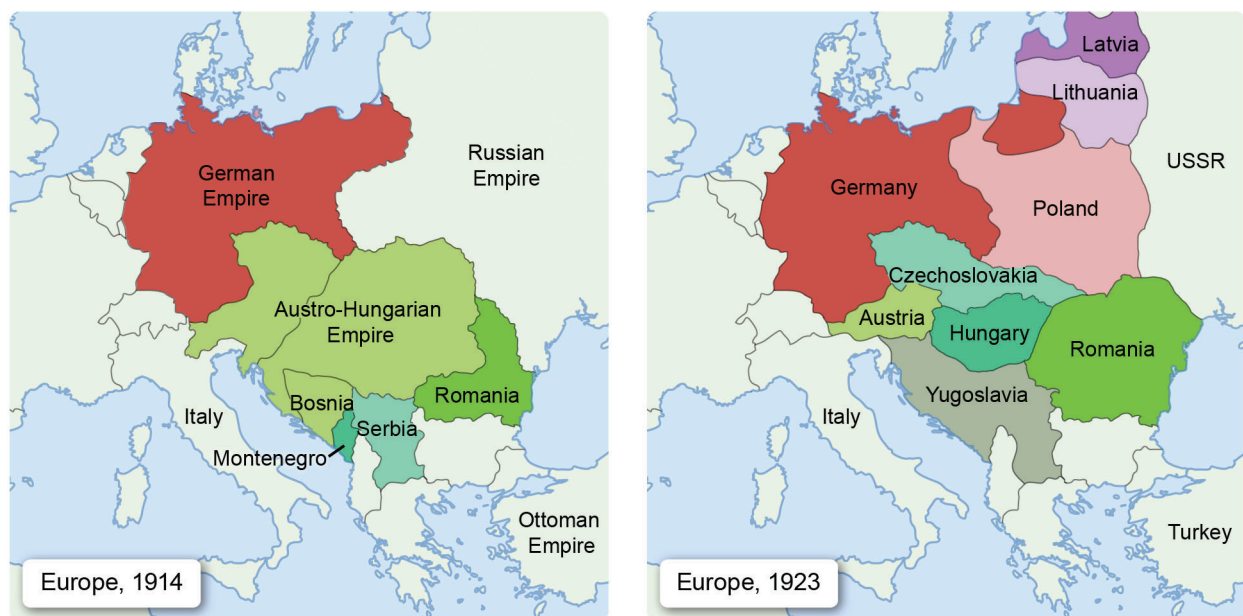
You will learn to:

- Define the various types of political entities.
- Identify examples of contemporary political entities, including nations, nation-states, stateless nations, multinational states, and autonomous and semiautonomous regions.

Political Geography

Political geography focuses on how Earth's surface is politically organized and divided. Political geographers also study how maps have changed over the centuries and how spatial organization leads to unequal social, political, and economic outcomes.

In this topic, we will investigate political entities and how they are organized worldwide. This topic will use contemporary political maps to detail different types of political entities and how they have changed throughout history.



The changes in the boundaries and types of governmental systems in Europe before and after World War I

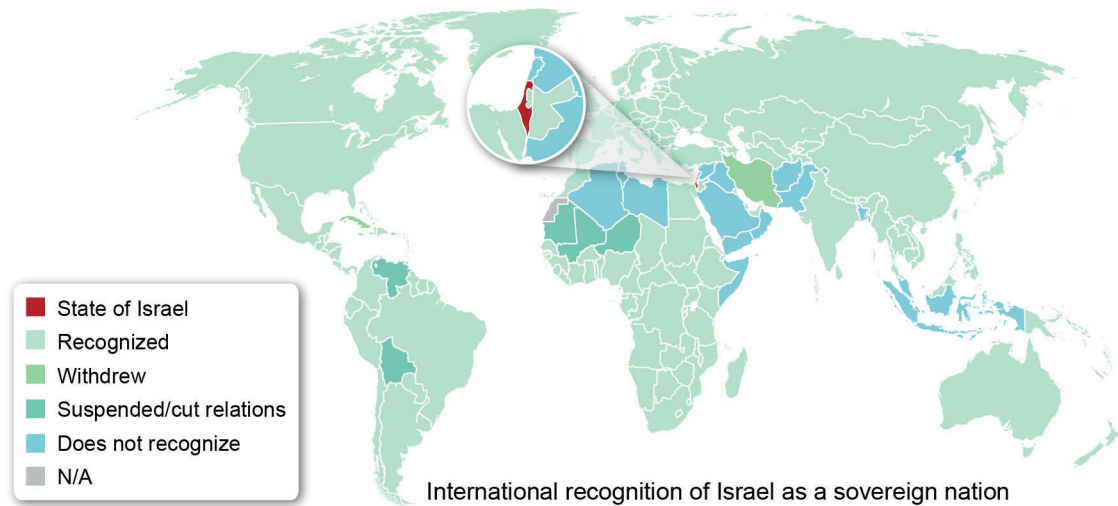
The Political State

To be considered a state, a location must meet certain criteria, including:

- Have a defined territory with a permanent population organized into a political unit
- Be ruled by a government that controls foreign and domestic affairs
- Be recognized by other states

Since the creation of the first state, which most historians believe was Egypt, countries have come into and out of existence, boundaries have changed, and the control of governments has often shifted from one regime to another.

Today, most states are sovereign, which means they have the right to govern themselves without interference from other states. To be sovereign, a country must be recognized by other states. Some countries, such as Israel, are not considered fully sovereign because they don't exercise supreme power over a significant portion of the geographic region where they are located. In Israel's case, this lack of supreme control is due to its decades-long dispute with a neighboring group, the Palestinians.



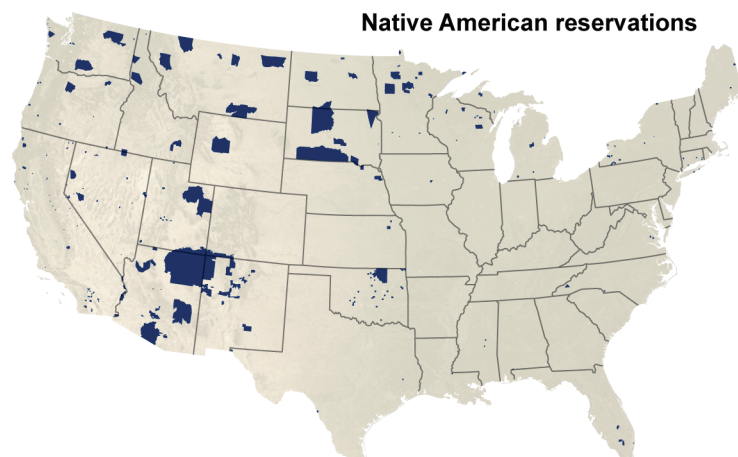
Other territories, such as Greenland, Guam, and Puerto Rico, are controlled by nations outside their borders. However, each of those territories has some self-governance while maintaining a close political relationship with the country that claims it.

Types of Political Entities

Despite the various types of political entities, there is no general agreement on how many independent states are in the world. Although, as of 2023, the United Nations recognized 195 countries, not every UN member state agrees on which countries are independent sovereign nations. This disagreement is partly due to the different terms used to describe political entities. To understand such differences fully, let's define the various classifications of political entities.

Nations

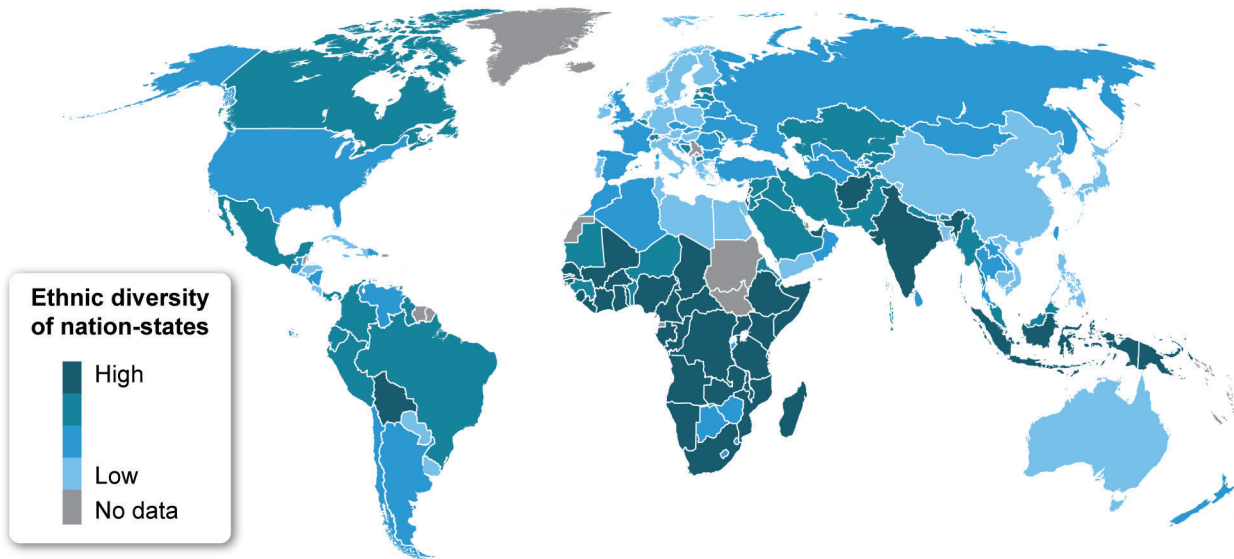
A nation is a cultural entity of people within a geographic region who share a past, common culture, heritage, and identity. Nations are different from states, which are political entities, because nations are often recognized within their respective countries. For instance, Native American groups are considered individual nations within the US. In total, the US acknowledges nearly 600 native nations.



Nation-states

A nation-state is a sovereign state whose cultural borders match its political boundaries. These countries have less cultural and ethnic diversity than other countries. Examples of nation-states include Australia, China, and the Republic of Ireland.

Even though some countries have less diversity than others, nearly all are multiethnic states to some degree. Maldives, in South Asia, is the only country where one ethnicity makes up 100% of the population. There are 37 countries where at least 85% of the population consists of a single ethnicity.



Stateless nations

A stateless nation is a minority cultural group that is without a state but united by shared cultural elements such as language, history, religion, and tradition. The Hmong people in East and Southeast Asia are one example of a stateless nation.

Like other stateless nations, such as the Palestinians and the Kurds, the Hmong are considered a unique cultural group, but they cannot form their own state. This inability is primarily because the people are spread out across several countries.

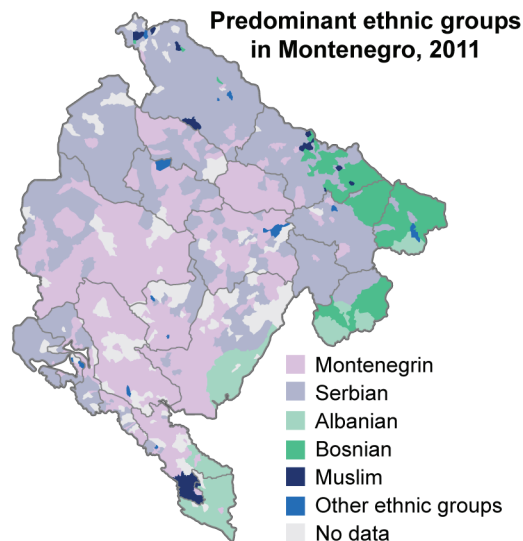
Governments often persecute stateless nations, increasing the chances of a diaspora. The Hmong have emigrated from Asia to France, Australia, and the US.

Multinational states

A multinational state has more than one nation within its borders, representing various ethnicities and cultures. There are many examples of multinational states.

Former multinational states	Current multinational states
Austro-Hungarian	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Czechoslovakia	Belgium
Ottoman Empire	Canada
Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth	India
Second Polish Republic	Malaysia
Soviet Union	Russia
Yugoslavia	South Africa

Another current multinational state is the Western European country Montenegro. Unlike most other countries, Montenegro doesn't have a majority ethnic population: the largest ethnic group, Montenegrins, make up only 45% of the country's population.



Multistate nations

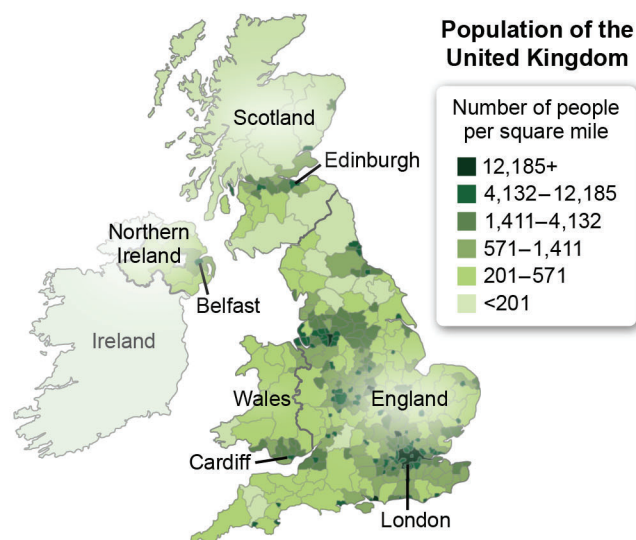
Different from the multinational state is the multistate nation—an ethnic or cultural group that extends beyond the borders of a single state. Ethnic Koreans are considered part of a multistate nation due to the Korean Peninsula's division after WWII.

In both North and South Korea, most of the population is Korean. In North Korea, only 0.002% of the population is non-Korean, a minority of Japanese and Chinese people. In South Korea, the minority population is higher, with 2.0% being Japanese, Han Chinese, White, or "other."

Autonomous and semiautonomous regions

Some countries grant autonomy or semiautonomy to certain regions, giving them a degree of authority over their territories. Such regions have self-governance over their internal affairs and are geographically distinct from a larger state that controls external affairs, including relationships with other countries.

Examples of autonomous regions include Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, which are part of the United Kingdom but are allowed to have their own prime ministers and parliaments. This gives them the power to legislate matters passed on to them by the UK government.



Semiautonomous regions are partially controlled by another state while having limited control over their internal affairs. For example, Native American reservations in the US are semiautonomous regions.

Tribal councils can enact legislation, such as safety laws, and tribal courts can settle legal disputes within their sovereign boundaries. However, US legal jurisdiction often overrules tribal law. Furthermore, tribes do not have the political authority to collect property taxes on reservation lands or to raise an army.

4.1 Vocabulary

Autonomous state	A region that has some degree of control over its internal affairs but is geographically distinct from a state that exerts control over it.
Culture	The customs, beliefs, traditions, and material traits of a group of people.
Diaspora	The geographic dispersal of an ethnic or religious population from their hearth. It is often used to describe a mass movement of people either through forced or involuntary migration.
Emigration	The movement of people who leave their country of origin to live elsewhere.
Multinational state	A state that has more than one nation within its borders.
Multistate nation	An ethnic or cultural group extending beyond state borders rather than living in a single state.
Nation-state	A relatively homogenous group of people who view themselves as a unified, sovereign state.
Semiautonomous region	A region that is partially controlled by another state but has limited control over its internal affairs.
State	A defined territory with a permanent population that is organized into a political unit, ruled by a government that controls its foreign and domestic affairs, and recognized by other states.
Stateless nation	A people who are united by cultural elements such as language, history, religion, and tradition but do not have their own state.

4.1 Check for Understanding

1. **A state is considered sovereign when it has the authority to determine its own policies and govern its territories without interference from outside actors.**
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. **Native New Zealanders, known as the Māori, have a similar culture, language, and history, and are considered to be**
 - A. a multistate nation
 - B. semiautonomous
 - C. a nation
3. **Which of the following countries would be considered a nation-state?**
 - A. Egypt
 - B. Canada
 - C. India
4. **In addition to groups such as the Kurds and Palestinians, which of the following would be considered a stateless nation?**
 - A. Afghanistan
 - B. Basques
 - C. South Korea