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Political Geography

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Humans have a tendency to partition space and exert control over that space as a group, often in the pursuit of resources.
 - A state is an area with defined and internationally-acknowledged boundaries—sovereignty is the acknowledgment that government has authority over the population of a state.
 - A nation is a group of people sharing a common culture and an attachment to a particular territory.
 - A nation-state is the combination of these concepts in that it is a politically-recognized territory with a principal national group.
- Nationalism assumes that the nation-state is the natural political unit.
- Many European states undertook periods of exploration and expansion, trying to build their empires by colonizing countries in Asia, Africa, and South America.
- There is variation amongst states about how they are ruled.
- Symptoms of instability can include conflicts, civil war, terrorism, or control by drug trade.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- define and differentiate among nations, states, and nation-states, and describe how multi-state nations or divisions of nations amongst states arose;
- identify the different theories of how nationalism arises and how nation-states form;
- describe how the formation of nation-states in Europe and subsequent empire building and colonialism affected the boundaries of states today;
- explain how states may be ruled and the factors that lead to stability or instability of a state;
- describe how colonialism and imperialism have related to a variety of unstable and even failed states; and
- understand the relevance of space and distance as they relate to international trade or “geopolitics.”

KEY TERMS

Anarchism A political philosophy that rejects the state and argues that social order is possible without a state. (p. 232)

Capitalism A social and economic system for the production of goods and services based on private enterprise. (p. 232)

Centrifugal forces Factors that make it difficult to bind an area together as an effective state, such as cultural divisions within the state. (p. 216)

Centripetal forces Factors that pull an area together into a single unit to create a relatively stable state. (p. 216)

Cold War A period of geopolitical confrontation without any direct military conflict between Western (led by the US) and communist (led by the USSR) powers that began shortly after the end of World War II and lasted until the early 1990s. (p. 217)

Core-periphery The ideas that states and regions are often unequally divided between powerful cores and dependent peripheries. (p. 223)

Democracy A form of government involving free and fair elections, openness and accountability, civil and political rights, and the rule of law. (p. 232)

Devolution A process of transferring power from central to regional or local levels of government. (p. 232)

Dictatorship An authoritarian, oppressive, and anti-democratic form of government in which the leader is often backed by the military. (p.232)

Facism A political philosophy that places nationality (and often race) above the rights of the individual and that supports a centralized (often autocratic) government headed by a dictatorial leader. (p. 232)

Federalism A form of government in which power and authority are divided between central and regional governments. (p. 216)

Geopolitics The study of state power over space (or territory) and the ability to shape international political relations. (p. 215)

Geopolitik The study of states as organisms that choose to expand in territory in order to fulfill their “destinies” as nation-states. (p. 216)

Gerrymandering The realignment of electoral boundaries with the specific intent to benefit a particular political party. (p. 216)

Heartland theory A geopolitical theory of world power based on the assumption that the state controlling the Eurasian heartland held the key to world domination. (p. 234)

Irredentism The view and assertion by one country that a minority population living outside its formal borders (usually in an adjacent country) rightfully belongs to it culturally. (p. 220)

Malapportionment A form of gerrymandering, involving the creation of electoral districts of differing population sizes to the benefit of a particular political party. (p. 234)

Maoism The revolutionary thought and practice of Mao Zedong (1893–1976), based on protracted revolution to achieve power and socialist policies after power is achieved. (p. 233)

Monarchy The institution of rule over a state by the hereditary head of a family; monarchists are those who favour this system. (p. 232)

Multinational state A political unit (state) that consists of two or more cultural groups (nations). (p.212)

Nation A group of people sharing a common culture (based on language, religion, ethnicity, and so on) and an attachment to a particular territory. (p. 210)

Nation-state A political unit (state) that contains one principal cultural group (nation) that gives it its identity. (p. 210)

Oligarchy Rule by an elite group of people, typically the wealthy. (p. 232)

Secession The act of a group (nation) formally withdrawing from a federation or political state. (p. 22)

Socialism A social and economic system that involves a shared (common) ownership of the means of production and the delivery of services. (p. 232)

Sovereign state A self-governing sovereign political entity with well-defined, and usually agreed-upon, territorial boundaries; in most usage synonymous with *independent country*. (p. 210)

Sovereignty The supreme authority or right of individual states (countries) to control political, economic, and social affairs within their territorial boundaries without external interference. (p. 210)

State A political entity with a defined territory, a permanent population, a government (often referred to as *the state*) which makes decisions about internal affairs and is (usually) recognized by other states. (p. 210)

Terrorism The threat or use of force to bring about political change. (p. 240)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the extent to which theories of state creation are most accurate and why.
2. Have there been successful cases of the devolution of power in multinational states? Give examples in your discussion.
3. Discuss the importance of examining space and voting patterns.
4. Discuss which factors contribute to a failed state. Consider history, geopolitics, and internal processes in your answer.
5. Is the world closer now to democracy and perpetual peace? Why or why not?

LINKS OF INTEREST

- The United Nations and Decolonization
<https://www.un.org/en/decolonization/>

- National Endowment for Democracy
<http://www.ned.org/>
- Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI)
<http://www.cigionline.org/>
- Global Geopolitics
<http://globalgeopolitics.net/>
- Governance International
<http://www.govint.org/>

SUGGESTED READINGS

Cohen, S. B. 2003. *Geopolitics of the World System*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.

A substantial volume that covers issues from a pragmatic perspective, identifying a hierarchy in the world system (geostrategic realms, geopolitical regions, national states, quasi-states, and territorial subdivisions), along with other features; includes predictions for the future.

Kuus, M. 2009. “Political Geography and Geopolitics,” *Canadian Geographer* 53: 86–90.

Valuable discussion of contributions made by Canadian political geographers to the subfield of geopolitics in recent years; emphasizes human agency.

Marshall, T. 2015. *Prisoners of Geography*. New York: Scribner.

A geopolitical text that argues that physical geography is our key political driver. The author uses ten maps of different parts of the world and explains how land shapes us and that to understand global politics, we first need to understand physical geography.

Tyner, J. A. 2009. *War, Violence, and Population*. New York: Guilford.

Insightful discussion of how states use violence to control and administer space; includes case studies to elucidate general concepts. Grounded in both theory and research and including detailed case studies.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

History Tube. 2009. “European Imperialism in Africa.” YouTube video, 4:08. Posted February 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJe1W_HIWmA

1. How did imperialism benefit Europeans?
 - Europe made money by accessing tremendous resources south of the Sahara in particular. Millions of people were killed and displaced but profits from the resources were sent back to the imperialism powers in Europe.

2. How was imperialism thought to be noble?
 - It was based on the idea that Europeans enjoyed strong economies, organized governments, strong military and navies. Meanwhile, African nations were troubled by economic weakness and poor political conditions.

Tahrir ICN. 2012. "This is Anarchism (In 10 Minutes)." YouTube video, 8:59. Posted December 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vv6eRj2-k>

1. What are the four dimensions of the political scale used in the video?
 - They are authoritarian left and authoritarian right, libertarian left, and libertarian right.
2. Where does the word "anarchy" come from?
 - The word comes from *anakhos* which means without rulers but not without rules. It is a common misperception that there are no rules in an anarchist society.