Country, State, and Nation

### Definining an Independent Country

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While the terms country, state, and nation are often used interchangeably, there is a difference.

A State (note the capital "S") is a self-governing political entity. The term State can be used interchangeably with country.

A nation, however, is a tightly-knit group of people which share a common culture. A nation-state is a nation which has the same borders as a State.

**States and Independent Countries**

Let's start with what defines a State or an independent country. An independent State:

* Has space or territory which has internationally recognized boundaries (boundary disputes are OK).
* Has people who live there on an ongoing basis.
* Has economic activity and an organized economy. A country regulates foreign and domestic trade and issues money.
* Has the power of social engineering, such as education.
* Has a transportation system for moving goods and people.
* Has a government which provides public services and police power.
* Has sovereignty. No other State should have power over the country's territory.
* Has external recognition. A country has been "voted into the club" by other countries.

There are currently [192 independent countries or States](http://geography.about.com/cs/countries/a/numbercountries.htm)1 around the world. Territories of countries or individual parts of a country are not countries in their own right.

Examples of entities that are **not** countries include: Hong Kong, Bermuda, Greenland, Puerto Rico, and most notably the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. (Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England are not countries.)

A "state" (with a lower-case "s") is usually a division of a federal State (such as the states of the United States of America).

**Nations and Nation-States**

Nations are culturally homogeneous groups of people, larger than a single tribe or community, which share a common language, institutions, religion, and historical experience.

When a nation of people have a State or country of their own, it is called a nation-state. Places like France, Egypt, Germany, Japan, and New Zealand are excellent examples of nation-states. There are some States which have two nations, such as Canada and Belgium. Even with its multicultural society, the United States is also referred to as a nation-state because of the shared American "culture."

There are nations without States. For example, the Kurds are stateless people.