

## Unit 4: The State

### 4a: Discuss the concept of a “state.”

4a.1. A state is a geographically defined area having some degree of sovereignty to decide its own course of action with regard to the individuals living within its boundaries and with respect to other states external to its borders.

A. As Boundless.com notes in "[Government and the State: Functions of the State](#)," a state is conceptualized as either a neutral body separate from society or the partisan instrument of a particular group within a society.

B. A state is an organized group of people under the jurisdiction of a specific governmental structure and leadership.

C. Theories of the state are tied with various political ideologies. For example, classic conservatism envisions the role of the state to be different from that seen by classic liberalism as the proper role of the state.

4a.2. States may be fully sovereign or under the ultimate authority of another state.

A. Each of the 50 states of the United States has its own form of government and a certain degree of sovereignty but is simultaneously bound together to the other states of the United States in ways that prevent it from having the same degree of absolute autonomy that a fully sovereign state (i.e., independent country) has.

B. Anarchists believe that no state should have power over the individuals living in it and that states are inherently immoral.

C. The pluralist view of states is that the state is a neutral body regulating and connecting diverse individuals and groups whose interests may conflict with each other's.

### 4b: Compare and contrast state, nation, and nation-state.

4b.1. A state is a polity (organized group of individuals) living in a particular territorial area with its own form of government.

A. Boundless.com's "[Government and the State: Characteristics of the State](#)" maintains that the state is “an organized political community acting under a government.” The same source asserts that states “differ in sovereignty, governance, geography, and interests.”

B. According to the above source, in a state operating according to the rule of law, no one person can rule and even the government itself is subjected to rules.

C. Civil society in a state consists of all those persons living under the jurisdiction of the state, collectively viewed as separate from the state itself, from the family, and from the market.

4b.2. A nation can be a group of people having a common ethnic identity or melded identity, or it can be thought of as synonymous with “state”.

A. Nations as groups of people have specific cultural identities.

B. Consider the ways that Wikipedia's article, "[Nation state](#)," discusses the concepts of nation and the related term “nation state” (or “nation-state”). According to this article, some envision the nation as coming first, before the formation of a state. Unless a group

of people has a common cultural identity, it is impossible for them to create a political entity with a structural form of governance under whose jurisdiction they will reside.

C. When people talk of the American nation, to what are they referring? Is there any such thing as a “nation” of Americans in a cultural sense, or is it impossible for a single “nation” of culturally similar people to exist in a geographical area where pluralism abounds and so many different ethnic groups are present?

4b.3. A nation-state conveys the notion that there is a country whose borders enclose a group of people having a common sense of nationhood – perhaps a common ethnic identity but more often a sense that together, they share universal values and goals and are committed to working in a cooperative way to keep their nation-state intact and moving forward.

A. The notion of the nation-state was not always present. Before 1648 and the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended thirty years of warfare among several nations in Europe, the concept of nation-state did not exist.

B. As explained in the Wikipedia article, "[Nation state](#)," the predominance of nation-states increased in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The unification of German feudal lands and of territories within Italy in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were significant events leading to the firmer establishment of national boundaries between countries in Western Europe.

C. In many cases, nationalists, or persons acting together out of a sense of common nationhood or cultural affinity, worked actively to promote the idea that a specific governmental jurisdiction and territory should be aligned with their own ethnic group. Such nationalists were instrumental in building the nation-state system.

Is it beneficial for persons of the same cultural identity to have a state of their own, or is this not always necessary? What are the variables that determine whether a group of people with a common sense of identity will be able to achieve the goal of having their own geographical territory within which they can live and which they can govern together for their mutual benefit? Would it be better for all national groups/ethnic groups in the world to have their own territorial state over which they would have authority, or is this impossible and perhaps even a recipe for disaster? Explain.

#### **4c: Describe the origins of the nation-state.**

4c.1. The first use of the term “nation-state” may have been in the early 1880s with Ernest Renan’s publication of his book, “*Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*” (“What is a nation?”).

A. Prior to the mid- to late-1800s, the concept of nation was in a formative stage in Europe. Persons sharing the same cultural and ethnic origins or sense of identity did not yet necessarily believe that a political jurisdiction was necessary to define and align with their group.

B. When a formal state apparatus and structure coincides with a group of people in a particular geographical area sharing the same cultural identity or ethnicity, a nation-state can form.

C. Few nation-states in the world are ethnically homogenous, meaning that there is rarely a nation that perfectly lines up with a state.

In what sense can it be considered natural that persons sharing the same ethnic identity would want to have their own geographical area to govern and in which they would live? Is it important for all peoples to have a specific location on the planet that they can call their own, in a sense? Does the notion of having a homeland with a particular political character make it necessary for all peoples to have their own specific country or state? Is this practical or even possible, considering the great diversity of ethnic groups in the world?

**4d: Explain the functions of the state.**

4d.1. The purpose of the state is to organize and carry out the main functions needed for maintaining a cohesive society capable of sustaining (if not flourishing) and defending itself.

**4e: Assess the future of the state as a political institution.**

4e.1. Many have argued that the system of global governance based on individual state identities and sovereignties is coming to an eventual end.

**4f: Define and explain the concepts of sovereignty and globalization in relation to the state.**

4f.1. The notion of sovereignty refers to the authority to carry out one's own missions without regard for the needs and wishes of other states and their populations.

A. Sovereignty is limited only insofar as it is understood and agreed upon that because abridging the rights of other states may lead to undesirable consequences for one's own state, states should respect the boundaries of other states and generally not interfere with the practices of governments of other states inside the other states' own borders.

B. With increasing globalization and greater awareness of and support for human rights worldwide, notions of absolute sovereignty are giving way to the view that states do have responsibilities for the people in other states, especially their own citizens.

4f.2. In an era of globalization, the role of the state becomes increasingly ill-defined and in some cases outright superfluous in the global push for interconnectivity.

**Unit 4 Vocabulary List**

State  
Nation  
Nation-state  
Nationalism  
Political institution  
Sovereignty  
Globalization