

# The Sovereign State

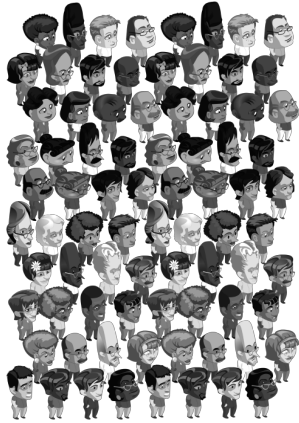
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## The State

No, not Texas, Oregon, Vermont . . . Those are states, but “a state” is something more than that. A **state** is a body of people, living in a defined space, with the power to make and enforce laws, and with an organization to do this. A state does not have to check with any higher authority in order to make and enforce laws. Its own organization, or government, is its highest authority.



*The Department of State represents the United States when dealing with other states.*



## Population

A **population** is the group of people who are the members or citizens of a state. A population can be large or small. China has a population of more than 1.3 billion people, while the island state of Fiji has just over 860,000.

The population of a state also has a variety of features. The population might be mainly *rural* or mostly *urban*. A state’s economic situation might mean most people are very *poor*, with little access to electricity or even water. Or the people might be generally *wealthy*, enjoying modern homes, running water, and the latest technology. Often this is connected to the level of *education* most people within the population have achieved. Populations also have their own *cultural traditions*, and they usually speak a common *language*.

## Territory

A state’s **territory** is the area in which a state’s rule applies. A state must have set boundaries. However, countries do not always agree on what each other’s boundaries are.

Boundaries can change over time. Sometimes they change after a *war*, when the states involved agree on new boundaries. When there is a dispute, states might also *negotiate* with each other to decide what the actual boundaries should be. Finally, states can *purchase* territory from other states, although this is less common today than it was in the past. In 1867, the U.S. bought Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million.



*Flags outside the United Nations headquarters. Each flag represents a sovereign state.*

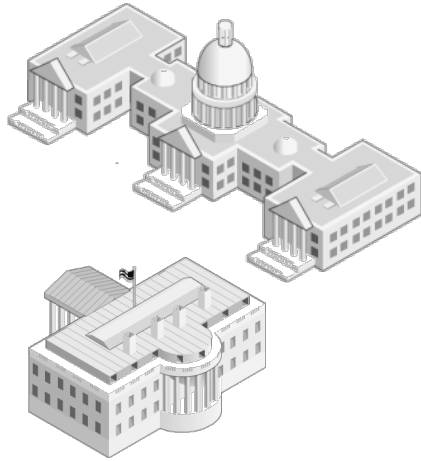
## Sovereignty

**Sovereignty** (pronounced SAW-vren-tee) is the ability to rule absolutely within a territory. The principle of sovereignty means that all states are considered *equal* to each other, and no state may interfere in the affairs of another state. In reality, the world’s states have created a higher authority, called the United Nations. States agree to follow the UN’s rules for dealing with each other — but they don’t have to follow them. Sovereign states are free to set their own *foreign policy*, meaning the kind of relationships they will have with other states. States also have the power to decide how things will operate inside their own boundaries. Today, though, if a state is unable to keep its population safe and many people are being killed—perhaps even by the government—the UN allows other states to use military force to protect the population.

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## Government

A **government** is the organization inside a state that controls the actions and policies of the state. A government has four main roles.

First a government makes laws. In this role, the government provides rules for how things inside the state are run. A government is also responsible for protecting the state. In this role, the government provides a military to defend the state against outside attack. Third, a government keeps order inside the state. It does this by establishing law enforcement agencies that deal with criminal activity. Finally, a government usually helps its citizens by providing services people need. This can be anything from a post office to paving streets to providing health care or unemployment benefits.

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