What is Political Geography all about?

- Political Geography helps to explain the cultural and physical factors that underlie political unrest in the world.
- How have people organized the earth's surface into countries/alliances and why?
- Why do conflicts result from the organization?

Political Geography

Key Issue 1: Where are states located?

The state

- A state is an area organized into a political unit and ruled by an established government that has control of internal and foreign affairs.
- It occupies a defined territory
- Sovereignty
- Uniform region
- Country
The United States of America?

- In political geography, the term "state" does not refer to the 50 regional governments within the U.S.
- The 50 states in the U.S. are actually subdivisions within a single state!

How many states are there?

- In the 1940's – there were 50
- In 2007 – 192 members of the United Nations
- There is some disagreement about the number of sovereign states

Problems defining states

- Antarctica: The only large landmass that is not a part of a state
- Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the U.K. claim portions of Antarctica
- The U.S. and Russia do not recognize any of those claims
- The Treaty of Antarctica signed in 1959 and renewed in 1991
Korea – One State or Two?

- After WWII – two occupation zones
- 1940's – permanent division
- 1950 – North Korea invaded South Korea
- 38th parallel
- Both have been admitted to the U.N as separate countries
- Progress towards reconciliation?

China and Taiwan – One State or Two?
China and Taiwan – One State or Two?
• Civil War in the 1940's
• Nationalists flee to Taiwan in 1949
• According to China, Taiwan is not a separate, sovereign state
• Until 1999, Taiwan agreed
• Most other countries recognize Taiwan as separate
• Taiwan is the most populous state not in the UN

Western Sahara (Sahrawi Republic)
• Sahrawi Democratic Republic
• Most African countries consider it to be sovereign
• Morocco claims the territory
• Spain
• Polisario Front
• 1991 cease-fire

Varying Size of States
• Largest state: Russia
• Other large states: China, Canada, U.S., Brazil, and Australia
• 2 dozen microstates (many are islands)
• The smallest state in the UN: Monaco
Development of the state concept

- Ancient States: Mesopotamia
- City-states: a sovereign state that comprises a town and the surrounding countryside
- Walls define the city, and the city would control the agricultural land surrounding it

Early European States

- The Roman Empire
- 5th Century AD
- Estates owned by competing kings, dukes, barons, and other nobles
- 1100: a few rulers of large estates gained power over large numbers of estates. This formed the basis for the development of England, France, and Spain.

Colonies

- Colony: a territory that is legally tied to a sovereign state rather than being completely independent
- Colonialism: the effort by one country to establish settlements and to impose political, economic, and cultural principles
- 3 motives for colonialism: God, gold, and glory
- Imperialism: control of a territory already occupied and organized by an indigenous society
Colonial Practices

• The French: attempted to assimilate its colonies into French culture
• The British: created different government structures and policies for various territories
  – The decentralized approach helped to preserve local cultures
• After WWII, most of Africa and Asia was independent

The Few Remaining Colonies

• Most remaining colonies are islands in the Pacific or Caribbean
• The most populous: Puerto Rico
  – 4 million residents are citizens of the U.S.
  – They do not vote, nor do they have a voting member of Congress
The few remaining colonies

- The least populous: Pitcairn Island
  - Possessed by the UK
  - In the South Pacific
  - It's 47 people survive on the 2 square miles by selling fish and postage stamps to collectors