



## Frames in Unit 2

The world in 1750 had many types of communities with different forms of government. But for the most part, people were subjects—they were governed by others and had few political rights. The nation-state was a new kind of government in which a nation of citizens could govern themselves in a particular territory. In this period, a number of nation-states were formed, and they have since come to dominate the world. But this was also an era in which many people were under the rule of empires, and remained subjects, rather than citizens.



**00:01**

*Bob Bain, PhD, University  
of Michigan*

*Animated map shows  
empires around the world  
– many spanning vast  
areas*

The world in 1750 was composed of many diverse human communities. Empires stretched across vast regions of the world. Some of these empires dated back quite a long time. In Afro-Eurasia, the Ottoman Empire's conquest of the eastern Mediterranean began as early as the 13th century. Russian expansion in central Asia went back 300 years. Mughal rule over south Asia dated back about 200 years. The Qing Dynasty ruled China and parts of central Asia for a century. Similarly, some of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Atlantic and the Americas can be traced back two or three centuries. At the same time, the British, French, and Dutch overseas empires were somewhat newer.

**00:55**

*Artworks and photos  
depict small communities  
together and in meetings*

But lots of people didn't live in empires. Many lived in smaller centralized states, mostly kingdoms of some sort, a form of government that dated back as much as 5,000 years. Others lived in even older types of organizations, small societies where all politics were local. These societies were led by councils or chiefs, connected by family or a shared sense of place, or in a confederation of villages loosely connected to each other.

**01:20**

*Images of ancient places  
of worship – temples, and  
mosques*

Of course, this didn't mean that their forms of community weren't changing or evolving, just that local conditions led to smaller, less centralized governance. The small size of these communities also doesn't mean that these people had no sense of community outside their local neighborhood or village. Many people sensed that they shared a language or a culture with people who didn't live in the same political unit as they did. Even more, people felt a sense of community with others who shared their religion, even far away. And many of their religions were very old indeed. Islam had existed for a millennium at this point. 18th century Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism were evolved from even older religious communities.

**02:04**

*Artwork depicting a ruler  
and his subjects*

One thing most people shared in common, whether they lived in a small community or a large empire, was an understanding that they were somebody's subjects. They shared a sense of not really having much political authority or standing of their own. Rather, they owed their allegiance to a chief, or prince, or ruler of some sort who had the right—or at least the power—to make decisions for them. But that was about to change.

**02:34**

*Changes in Sovereignty*

*Painting of a democratic  
meeting taking place – a  
first example of national  
sovereignty*

In the long 19th century, the era between 1750 and 1914, new ideas were emerging—individual sovereignty, the conviction that a person has the right to control their own body and choices; national sovereignty, the idea that people together have the right to make political decisions and exercise leadership; and nationalism, the belief that people, governing themselves, have the right to a homeland. So people created a new form of community called the nation-state. The nation-state is a state—a legal unit and a piece of territory—that coincides with a nation—a self-governing group of people. This change was a big deal, as you will see in this unit. But we have to analyze it a bit.

**03:18**

*Artworks depicting  
revolutions in Haiti,  
France, and the Americas*

In the first place, some people before 1750 had experimented with ideas that sounded something like sovereignty and something like governments that had elements of the nation-state. Also, after 1750, things changed gradually even where big revolutions created the first new nation-states like in Haiti, France, and the Americas. Finally, the long 19th century was also an era of empires, as we will

**03:52**

*A painting of a steam-  
engine train*

discuss later. And empires were almost the opposite of the nation-state.

Nevertheless, these new nation-states represented maybe the most important changes in the communities frame in hundreds of years. New technologies developed to support larger and larger states. Better methods of organization and communication extended the reach of the state, and new military technology made governments stronger than local warlords or nobles. With these new advantages, the nation-state dominated other forms of political organization. They came to cover just about the whole world. For better or worse, we live in a world of nation-states even today.