

Definition of the State

A **state** is a set of institutions that possesses the **exclusive legitimate** authority to make the rules that govern the people in one or more societies, having internal and external sovereignty over a definite territory. The state includes such institutions as the armed forces, civil service or state bureaucracy, courts, and police.

Although the term often refers broadly to all institutions of government or rule—ancient and modern—the modern state system bears a number of characteristics that were first consolidated in Western Europe, beginning in earnest in the 15th century. Through conquest, war and revolution, the entirety of the world's inhabitable land has been divided into more than 200 sovereign states, the vast majority of which are represented in the United Nations.