

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

**Philip G. Roeder: Where Nation-States Come From**

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2007, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

Follow links for Class Use and other Permissions. For more information send email to: [permissions@pupress.princeton.edu](mailto:permissions@pupress.princeton.edu)

# ONE

## Who Gets a State of Their Own?

**A NATION IN THE MODERN ERA** is a population that purportedly has a right to a state of its own.<sup>1</sup> Over the two centuries that we call the age of nationalism, philosophers, politicians, and polemicists have imagined hundreds, if not thousands, of nation-states. Indeed, a piece of folk wisdom often repeated in academic and policy communities holds that around the world today there may be as many as six to eight hundred active nation-state projects and another seven to eight thousand potential projects.<sup>2</sup> Yet today, only a little more than 190 nation-states have achieved the status of sovereign, independent members of the world community.<sup>3</sup> This begs a question: Why do some nation-state projects succeed in achieving sovereign independence while most fail?

The current configuration of borders in the world that privileges these 190 or so nation-state projects over the alternatives is something of a puzzle. Few would defend the present configuration as politically, economically, or culturally optimal. Indeed, on all continents there are competing projects to unite some states into larger states, such as a European Union or regional unions of African states; to make others smaller by granting independence to such substate entities as the Basque Country or Somaliland; or simply to decertify some nation-states and redraw borders in a more rational or efficient manner. Their proponents have made compelling cases that these new states would be superior to the current nation-states.

The question of which nations get states of their own is obviously a question of why some nation-state projects have triumphed over the empires, multinational states, and nation-states they replaced. Yet it is more complex than that. During the crises that led to new nation-states, typically there were multiple, competing nation-state projects on the table. For example, during the process that led to the fragmentation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union) into fifteen successor

<sup>1</sup> This definition of the term “nation” derives from Max Weber’s definition in “Diskussionsreden auf dem zweiten Deutschen Soziologentag in Berlin 1912”: “a nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own.” See Gerth and Mills 1958, 176.

<sup>2</sup> Gellner 1983, 45.

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations in mid-2006 included 192 nation-states and recognized one other sovereign state as an observer, the Vatican City State. In addition, the Republic of China (Taiwan) constituted a potential nation-state.











































































