They met together in the cabin of the little ship on the day of the landfall. The journey from England had been long and stormy. Provisions ran out, a man had died, a boy had been born. Although they were grateful to have reached the calm waters off Cape Cod that November day of 1620, their gathering in the cramped cabin was not to offer prayers of thanksgiving but to create a political structure to govern the settlement they had come to establish (Figure 9.1). The Mayflower Compact was an agreement among themselves to "covenant and combine our selves together into a civill body politick . . . to enacte, constitute, and frame such just and equall lawes, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices . . . convenient for ye generall good of ye Colonie. . . ." They elected one of their company governor, and only after those political acts did they launch a boat and put a party ashore.

The land they sought to colonize had for more than 100 years been claimed by the England they had left. The New World voyage of John Cabot in 1497 had invested their sovereign with title to all of the land of North America and a recognized legal right to govern his subjects dwelling there. That right was delegated by royal patent to colonizers and their sponsors, conferring upon them title to a defined tract and the right to govern it. Although the Mayflower settlers were originally without a charter or patent, they recognized themselves as part of an established political system. They chose their governor and his executive department annually by vote of the General Court, a legislature composed of all freemen of the settlement.

As the population grew, new towns were established too distant for their voters to attend the General Court. By 1636 the larger towns were sending representatives to cooperate with the executive branch in making laws. Each town became a legal entity, with election of local officials and enactment of local ordinances the prime purpose of the town meetings that are still common in New England today.

The Mayflower Compact, signed by 41 freemen as their first act in a New World, was the first step in a continuing journey of political development for the settlement and for the larger territory of which it became a part. From company patent to crown colony to rebellious commonwealth under the Continental Congress to state in a new country, Massachusetts (and Plymouth Plantation) were part of a continuing process of the political organization of space.

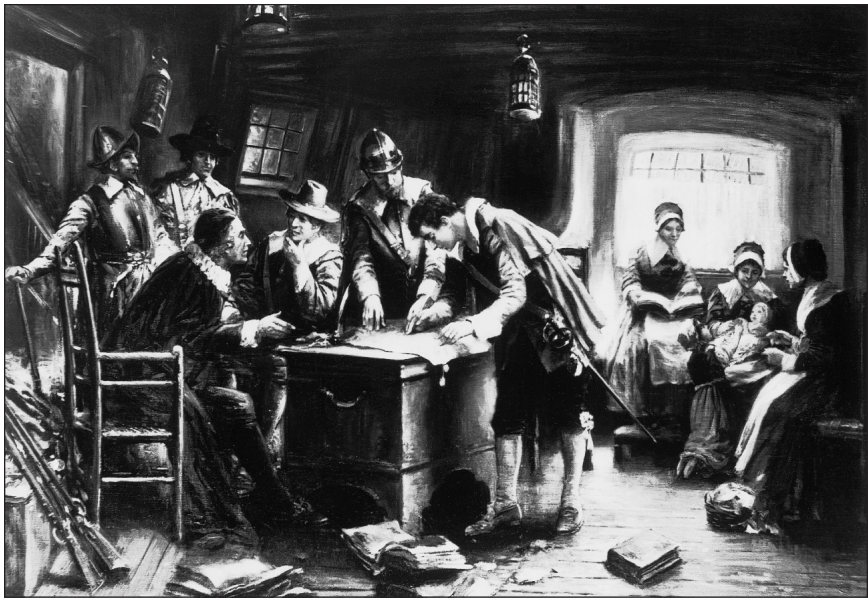

Figure 9.1 **Signing the Mayflower Compact,** probably the first written plan for self-government in America. Forty-one adult male Pilgrims signed the Compact aboard the *Mayflower* before going ashore.
Courtesy of the Pilgrim Society, Plymouth, MA.

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That process is as old as human history. From clans to kingdoms, human groups have laid claim to territory and have organized themselves and administered their affairs within it. Indeed, the political organizations of society are as fundamental an expression of culture and cultural differences as are forms of economy or religious beliefs. Geographers are interested in that structuring because it is both an expression of the human organization of space and is closely related to other spatial evidences of culture, such as religion, language, and ethnicity.

Political geography is the study of the organization and distribution of political phenomena in their areal expression. Nationality is a basic element in cultural variation among people, and political geography traditionally has had a primary interest in country units, or *states* (Figure 9.2). Of central concern have been spatial patterns that reflect the

Figure 9.2 These flags, symbols of separate member states, grace the front of the United Nations building in New York City. Although central to political geographic interest, states are only one level of the political organization of space.

exercise of central governmental control, such as questions of boundary delimitation and effect. Increasingly, however, attention has shifted both upward and downward on the political scale. On the world scene, international alliances, regional compacts, and producer cartels have increased in prominence since World War II, representing new forms of spatial interaction. At the local level, voting patterns, constituency boundaries and districting rules, and political fragmentation have directed public attention to the significance of area in the domestic political process.

In this chapter, we discuss some of the characteristics of political entities, examine the problems involved in defining jurisdictions, seek the elements that lend cohesion to a political entity, explore the implications of partial surrender of sovereignty, and consider the significance of the fragmentation of political power. We begin with states and end with local political systems.

Emphasis here on political entities should not make us lose sight of the reality that states are rooted in the operations of the economy and society they represent, that social and economic disputes are as significant as border confrontations, and that in some regards transnational corporations and other nongovernmental agencies may exert more influence in international affairs than do the separate states in which they are housed or operate. Some of those expanded political considerations are alluded to in the discussions that follow; others are developed more fully in Chapter 10.

National Political Systems

One of the most significant elements in cultural geography is the nearly complete division of the earth's land surface into separate national units, as shown on the Countries of the World map inside this book's cover. Even Antarctica is subject to the rival territorial claims of seven countries, although these claims have not been pressed because of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 (Figure 9.3). A second element is that this division into country units is relatively recent. Although countries and empires have existed since the days of early Egypt and Mesopotamia, only in the last century has the world been almost completely divided into independent governing entities. Now, people everywhere accept the idea of the state, and its claim to sovereignty within its borders, as normal.

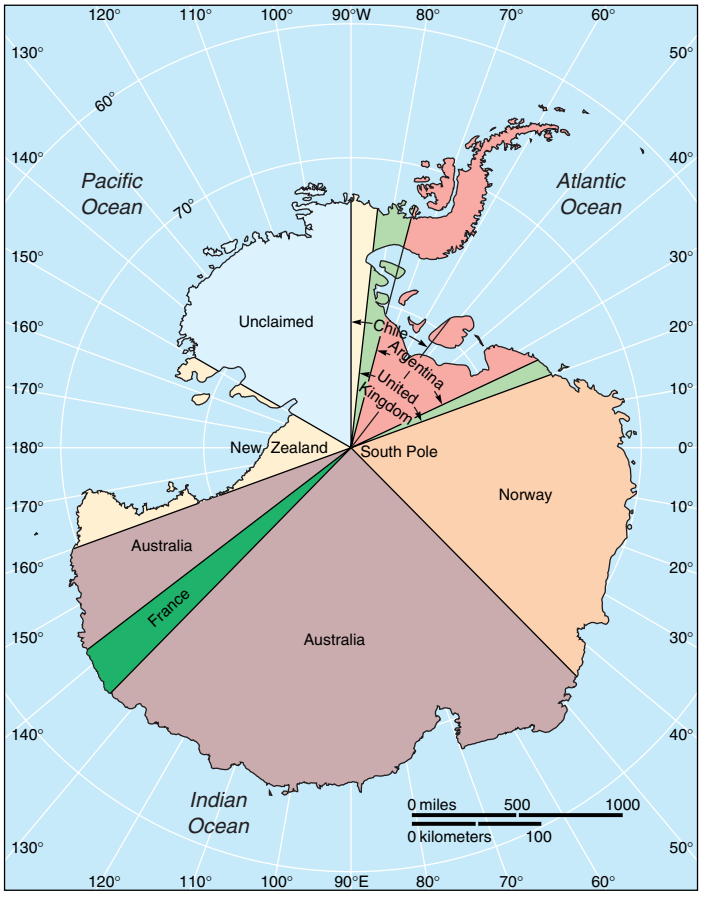

Figure 9.3 **Territorial claims in Antarctica.** Seven countries claim sovereignty over portions of Antarctica, and those of Argentina, Chile, and the United Kingdom overlap. The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 froze those claims for 30 years, banned further land claims, and made scientific research the primary use of the continent. The treaty was extended for 50 years in 1991. Antarctica is neither a sovereign state—it has no permanent inhabitants or local government—nor a part of one.