CHAPTER

18

New Nation-States from the Old Soviet Empire: Will They Succeed?

18.1 Introduction

"Iron Felix" Dzerzhinsky was a brutal man. Under his direction, hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the Russian Revolution of 1917. The revolution destroyed the czarist **empire** of Russia. In its place, leaders created a new state called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or Soviet Union, in 1922.

The new government controlled the 15 separate republics that made up the Soviet Union, and chose Iron Felix to set up a secret police force tasked with the job of destroying all opposition. The secret police arrested millions of people who were suspected of being disloyal. A statue of Dzerzhinsky in a Moscow square reminded people that the police were always watching.

In the 1980s, the Soviet government faced serious challenges to its authority. By 1991, people had had enough. An angry crowd attacked the statue of Iron Felix, cheering wildly as the symbol of fear tumbled. By year's end, the government had fallen as well. The Soviet Union was no more.

Fifteen new **nation-states** were formed out of the ruins of the Soviet empire. The term *nation-state* combines two ideas. The first, **nation,** refers to a group of people who share a common history and culture. Another term for people with such a shared identity is **ethnic group**. The second, **state,** refers to a political unit that controls a fixed territory. A nation-state is a country whose people mostly share a common identity.

In this chapter, you will read about the Soviet Union and five of the new nation-states that replaced it. And you will find out what makes a new nation-state likely to succeed or fail.

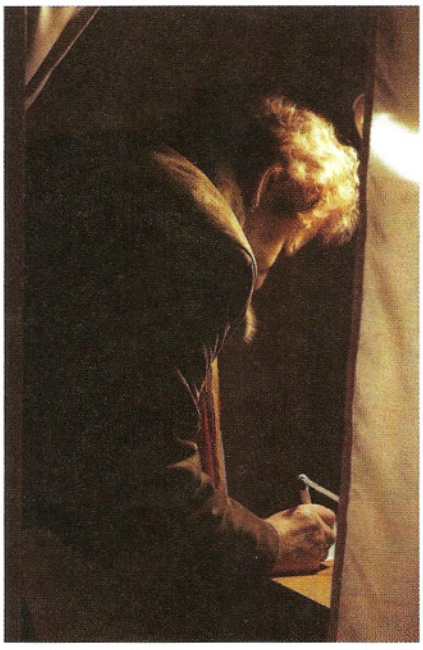
Essential Question

What factors contribute to the success or failure of new nation-states?

This illustration names 5 of the 15 new nation-states that came out of the old Soviet Union. Their success will depend on both economic and political factors. Keep this illustration in mind as you try to answer the Essential Question.

Graphic Organizer

◀ Statue of "Iron Felix" Dzerzhinsky in Moscow (top), Russian protesters toppling the statue in 1991 (bottom)



Voting in a New Nation-State
Every year an organization called Freedom House rates countries on how free they are. Freedom House looks at how well a country protects two kinds of rights. The first is political rights, such as the right to vote or run for office. The second is civil rights, including the right to speak and worship freely. Freedom House rates a country as free, partly free, or not free.

18.2 The Geographic Setting

The Soviet Union was a vast country, covering more than half of Europe and nearly two fifths of Asia. In area it was almost two and a half times the size of the United States. It had the third largest population in the world, behind China and India.

From Superpower to Failed State From 1945 to 1990, the Soviet Union was one of the world's two great **superpowers**. (The United States was the other.) Its armed forces were the largest in the world, and it possessed a fearsome nuclear arsenal. The Soviet Union also took the lead in space exploration for much of this period in history.

In 1991, however, this superpower collapsed. That year, the Soviet Union became the world's largest **failed state**. The question is why. One way to answer this question is to compare the Soviet Union with a successful nation-state.

Features of Successful Nation-States Many factors affect the success of a nation-state, but five are critical. Those factors are security, political freedom, economic growth, quality of life, and national unity.

The most important job of a nation-state is to keep its people safe. A successful state is strong enough to protect its people from foreign enemies, and its police work to keep people safe from crime. While the Soviet Union had a powerful army for defense, its secret police made people feel less, not more, secure.

A successful nation-state also protects the rights and freedoms of its citizens. In a free country, people choose their leaders by honest and fair elections, voting freely without fear of arrest. Elected leaders usually have the authority that comes from strong public support. In contrast, the Soviet Union was ruled by **dictators**—leaders who governed by force without the people's consent.

Another key to the success of a nation-state is economic growth, with the state using its resources and location to promote a healthy economy. Its **gross domestic product** (GDP)—the total value of goods and services produced in the country—rises over time. As GDP rises, incomes rise, and as incomes rise, poverty declines. In the Soviet Union, GDP rose slowly or not at all.

A successful nation-state also tries to improve its people's quality of life. The government works to ensure that its citizens have adequate and safe food, clean water, and good medical care. As people live healthier lives, **life expectancy** increases and **infant mortality rates** decrease. In the Soviet Union, however, quality of life was not improving for many people.

Successful nation-states inspire patriotism, or love of country, in their people, encouraging citizens to work to make the country succeed. Successful nation-states also inspire **nationalism**—feelings of pride and loyalty toward one's nation. In countries like the Soviet Union that have many ethnic groups, nationalism can create a sense of unity.

However, ethnic group nationalism can sometimes work against national unity. By 1991, ethnic loyalty in the Soviet Union had more support than loyalty to country. At that point, many ethnic groups decided that they would be better off as independent nation-states than as part of a failing Soviet Union.

Geoterms

ethnic group a group of people in a country who share a unique culture and identity

nation a large group of people who share a common history and culture. Not all nations have their own government or control a territory. But in common use, the word *nation* often means a country or nation-state.

nationalism feelings of loyalty and pride toward one's nation or ethnic group. Nationalism sometimes includes the belief that one's nation or group is better than all others.

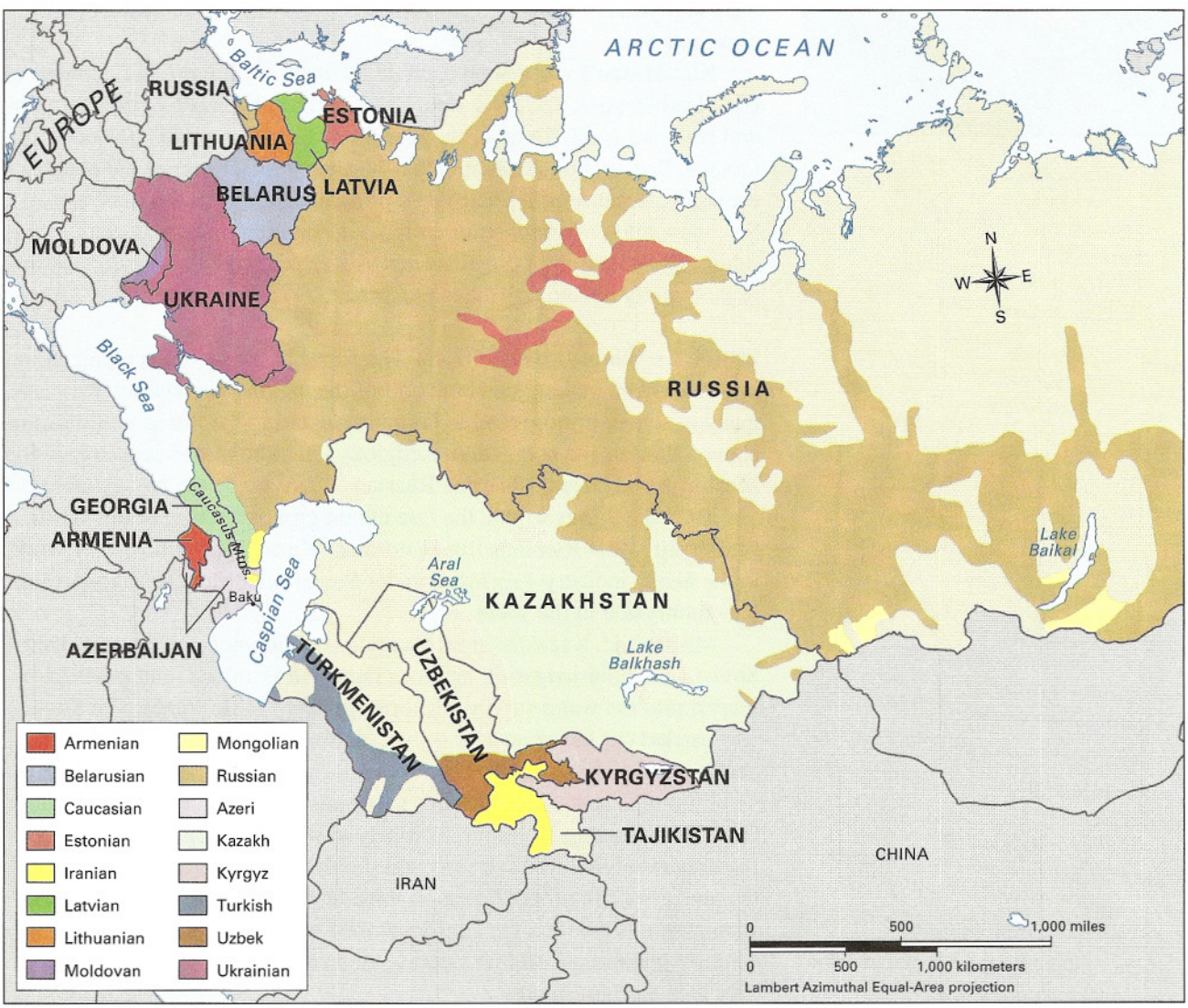
nation-state an independent state, or country, whose people mostly share a common identity

state a political unit that controls a particular territory

A Diverse Region

More than 100 ethnic groups lived in the Soviet Union at the time of its collapse. This map shows the major ethnic groups that were in various areas. Conflicts among ethnic groups helped bring about the collapse of this state.

Major Ethnic Groups in the Soviet Union



A Kazakh Herdsman
For centuries, the Kazakhs were mainly nomads, people who move from place to place. They raised sheep, goats, cattle, and horses for meat, wool, and hides. They traveled hundreds of miles each year in search of pasture for their herds. A few Kazakhs still follow this ancient way of life.

18.3 Kazakhstan: A Central Asian Giant

The nation-state of Kazakhstan is a Central Asian giant surrounded by other giants. To the southeast lies China. To the north lies Russia. To the west lies the Caspian Sea.

An Arid Land with Many Resources While much of Kazakhstan is too **arid** for agriculture, the northern region and some irrigated areas in the south yield abundant crops. Kazakhs also raise cattle, goats, poultry, pigs, and sheep.

Kazakhstan's greatest resource is its minerals. It has large deposits of coal, lead, copper, iron, and zinc. But Kazakhstan's most significant mineral resource is oil. Some of the world's largest oil reserves lie under the Caspian Sea, and oil production has become a major part of the country's economy. Because of Kazakhstan's prime location between the Caspian Sea and China, oil production promises to be even more important in the future. Construction of pipelines across Kazakhstan will allow oil to flow to the rapidly developing cities of China.

Ethnic Conflicts Create a Split The Kazakhs are the main ethnic group in Kazakhstan, making up about half of the nation's population. Russians, many of whom **immigrated** to Kazakhstan during the Soviet era, make up about a third of the population. Religious and cultural differences between Muslim Kazakhs and Christian Russians often divide the two groups.

To make things worse, the two ethnic groups have a serious north-south split. Most Russians live in northern Kazakhstan, where they work in the heavy industry developed under Soviet rule. Most Kazakhs live in the countryside in the south.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan faces serious environmental problems. Under Soviet rule, poor irrigation methods damaged farmland, and **pesticides** seeped into the water supply. Factories released **toxic waste**. The Soviets also carried out secret nuclear testing, and many people still suffer serious health problems as a result.

Looking ahead, Kazakhstan's survival will depend on several factors. One factor is using its resources wisely to promote economic growth. Another is solving its environmental problems and therefore improving the quality of life of its citizens. A third factor crucial to the success of Kazakhstan is calming the conflict among ethnic groups that divides the country. If it can succeed at meeting all three challenges, Kazakhstan may face a bright future.

18.4 Azerbaijan: Where Europe Meets Asia

Together, the new nation-states of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan are known as the Caucasus because of the steep Caucasus Mountains that tower over them. This region is one of the world's great crossroads, where Europe meets Asia. Azerbaijan's location and resources hold the keys to its future.

A Country Rich in Oil Azerbaijan's huge deposits of oil are its greatest source of wealth and its number one export. In fact, Azerbaijan was the birthplace of the oil-refining industry. Today the capital city of Baku, with the finest harbor on the Caspian Sea, is the center of Azerbaijan's oil industry.

During Soviet rule, oil pipelines sent all of Azerbaijan's oil to neighboring Russia. When the Soviet Union collapsed, however, so did its hold on Azerbaijan. The new country was then free to sell its oil anywhere in the world.

Since 1991, Azerbaijan has signed agreements with many foreign oil companies. Construction of new pipelines will enable Azerbaijan to move its oil to customers outside of Russia. Working with foreign oil companies is not easy, but Azerbaijan's economic success depends on opening new markets for its oil.

Ethnic Warfare Clouds the Future Ethnic conflicts between groups in Azerbaijan and neighboring Armenia have been a major obstacle to progress for the new nation-state. The Azeris are the main ethnic group in Azerbaijan, making up over 90 percent of the population. Most Azeris are Muslim. About 2 percent of the population in Azerbaijan is Armenian, and most Armenians are Christians. The Azeris and the Armenians have a long history of conflict.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region within Azerbaijan that is primarily Armenian. The people of this region want to be independent from Azerbaijan and, in 1992, war broke out between the two groups. Thousands of people were killed, and almost a million people fled from the fighting. Though a cease-fire was called in 1994, the problem was not solved. Violence continues to this day and threatens the stability of Azerbaijan.

A Wealth of Oil

Oil is Azerbaijan's most important resource. It has enough oil to fill more than 200 billion barrels. One barrel of oil produces about 19 gallons of gasoline.

18.5 Belarus: Between Europe and Russia

The word Belarus means "white Russia." No one knows for sure why the color is part of the country's name. It might refer to the snow that often covers the land. It might describe the white bark of the birch trees in its forests. The "rus" part of Belarus reflects its location next to Russia on its eastern border. On the west, Belarus borders Europe.

A Landlocked Country of Many Lakes This nation of rolling plains and dense forests is **landlocked**. In other words, it is surrounded entirely by land, with no access to the sea. Long ago, glaciers scraped across its plains, creating the 11,000 lakes that dot the Belarus landscape.

In the past, the economy of Belarus was based on agriculture and logging. While both activities are still important today, now about a fifth of Belarusian farmland and forestland can no longer be used. Tragically, this land was poisoned when the nearby Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded in 1986. Much of this large area will never be safe for farming or logging again.

Belarus Looks East to Russia Russian influence is strong in Belarus, though the population of the country is approximately 81 percent Belarusian and only 11 percent Russian. During Soviet rule, Russian workers and government officials did much to develop Belarus. They cleared and drained its land to create farms managed by the government. They also brought manufacturing and industry to Belarusian cities. The Russians also shaped the Belarusian political system and influenced its culture.

Today Belarus still has close ties to Russia. Most of its foreign trade is with Russia, and it depends on Russian gas and oil to run its industries. The two countries have signed agreements to work together closely in the future.

However, relations between Belarus and Russia are not always smooth. The two countries disagree about labor and trade issues and ha different ideas about how much power the government should have over its citizens and industries. Although the economy of Belarus is growing, there are many challenges ahead.

A Belarus Tractor Factory
Making farm machines is a large industry in Belarus. These tractors were built in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

Rewards for Voting
This woman is buying groceries using coupons that she received for voting. Supermarket chains in Lithuania gave these coupons to citizens who voted in a 2003 election. In that election, Lithuanians voted to join the EU.

18.6 Lithuania: One of Three Baltic States

Three former republics of the Soviet Union—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—are known as the Baltic States. They line the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Lithuania can look either east or west for political ties. More and more, it looks west.

An Economy Based on Soil and the Sea The fertile soil of Lithuania produces good crops. Farmers grow potatoes, sugar beets, and flax for cloth. Fields of grain cross the central plains. Dairy farms are everywhere, and cattle, sheep, pigs, and poultry provide meat and eggs. The Baltic Sea provides a rich source of food as well, with its fishing grounds and fish farms.

Lithuania has limited mineral resources. The Lithuanians mine limestone, gravel, sand, and clay to make cement, glass, and ceramics. But fossil fuels and metals are in short supply.

Lithuania Looks West to Europe Lithuania has a long history of unity, having come together as a nation around 1200. With a strong sense of nationalism, Lithuania was the first republic of the Soviet Union to declare its independence as a nation-state in 1990.

Since their independence from Soviet rule, the Lithuanian people have reformed their political system. They have looked toward Europe for their models, and today they have a democratic government with leaders chosen in free and fair elections.

Lithuania has sought to join the European community economically as well. In 2004, Lithuania became a member of the **European Union,** or EU. Chapter 14 explores the EU in detail. Lithuania receives monetary support from the EU to help develop its economy.

Lithuania has also joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO. Members of NATO promise to defend each other if attacked by another country. By joining NATO and the EU, Lithuanians hope to create a future of peace and prosperity.

18.7 Russia: The Largest Nation on Earth

Imagine observing from space as your country breaks apart and then ceases to exist. That's what Soviet astronaut Sergei Krikalev did in 1991. He flew up to the Mir space station as a citizen of the Soviet Union. While he circled Earth 16 times a day, the Soviet Union collapsed. When he finally set foot on land, he was still a citizen of the largest nation on Earth. But that nation was now Russia.

Rich Resources in a Vast Land Although Russia is not as large as the Soviet Union was, it's still huge. It has vast forests and large deposits of coal and minerals, with its most important resources being oil and natural gas. Because of its cold **climate,** however, less than 8 percent of Russia's land is suitable for farming.

During Soviet rule, the government owned and operated this vast country's farms, factories, and businesses. When Soviet rule ended, the government sold these factories and businesses. But these sales did not help the Russian people. Powerful political leaders grabbed the best businesses for themselves.

Today most Russian businesses are privately run, but not always well run. Many of the factories the government sold were old, run down, and in need of modernization, but often the new owners had no money to make the changes. Other businesses made goods of such poor quality that no one wanted to buy them. As a result, many businesses failed.

In spite of all its challenges, Russia's economy has been growing every year. Oil exports are a big reason for this growth.

St. Basil's Cathedral

Ivan the Terrible, the first czar of all Russia, built St. Basil's Cathedral. Legend says that when the church was finished, Ivan ordered its architect to be blinded. This, the czar hoped, would prevent him from ever creating anything so beautiful again. However, the architect did go on to design another cathedral.

The Challenges Facing Russians Today Life is not easy in Russia. The crime rate is high. Housing is very costly, and many people have to crowd in with relatives. Alcohol abuse and pollution are also big concerns that threaten people's health.

Ethnic nationalism and religious divisions have caused problems in Russia as well. Russia's 150 million people come from dozens of ethnic groups, not all of which are pleased to still be a part of Russia. In addition, most Russians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, but Russia also has minority religious groups such as Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and non-Orthodox Christian. Law limits the activities of some religious groups. For example, some of them are not allowed to print religious literature or operate religious schools.

In an area of southwest Russia known as Chechnya, opposition to Russian rule has led to outright rebellion. During the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a group of Chechen leaders declared independence from Russia. But in 1994, Russian tanks rolled into Chechnya to crush the independence movement. More than 100,000 Chechens died in the war that followed. Though a cease-fire brought an official peace to Chechnya in 1996, the conflict continues. Battles, bombings, and terrorist attacks have killed thousands of people on both sides of the conflict.

Air Pollution in Russia
During Soviet rule, new factories were built across Russia. But little attention was paid to pollution. In 84 of Russia's largest cities, air pollution is still 10 times the level that is considered safe.

18.8 Beginning to Think Globally

In this chapter, you learned about five factors that affect whether a new nation-state will succeed or fail. These factors are security, political freedom, economic growth, quality of life, and national unity. You have seen the power of nationalism to unite a country. You have also seen how conflict among ethnic groups can tear a country apart.

Each of the 15 nation-states that arose from the former Soviet Union has its own story, and only time will tell whether each will succeed. The same could have been said about the United States in its early years, as its future also looked uncertain. It won its war of independence only with outside help. Its people felt more loyal to their states than to a new country called the United States, and they distrusted the federal government. The country's economy was weak. And its first government could not seem to hold the new nation together.

The world is always changing, with empires rising and collapsing and new nations starting and failing. Think about these changes as you look at the map showing the rise of new nations in the next section. Which nations will succeed? And which are likely to fail?

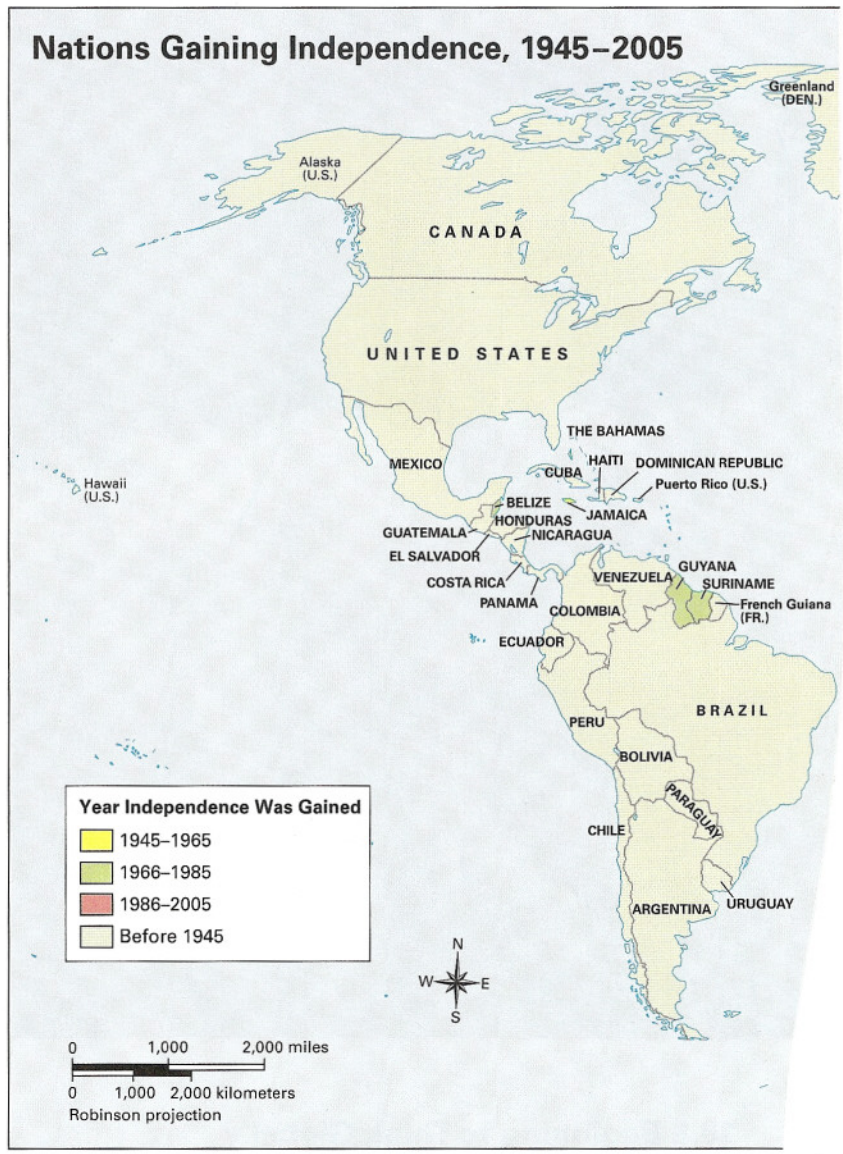
18.9 Global Connections

The map shows new nations that have arisen since 1945, and the table gives data about three nations that have gained their independence since 1990. Think about what the information in the table might reveal about each nation's chance of success.

What were these new nations before they gained their independence? Most of the new nations formed since 1945 were once colonies ruled by other nations. This history of colonial rule is especially true for the new nations of Africa and Asia. Namibia, for example, was once a German colony in Africa. Other new nations were parts of dying empires or failed states. Croatia, for instance, was once a part of the failed state of Yugoslavia. Still other new nations were parts of nations that still exist. East Timor, for example, was part of Indonesia from 1976 until 1999, when it won its independence.

How did these new nations gain their independence? Most new nations gain their independence through violent struggle. Namibia, Croatia, and East Timor all had to fight to become independent nations. Some new nations, however, have a peaceful start. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, its 15 republics peacefully gained their independence.

Which of these new nations are most likely to succeed? The answer, as you have learned, depends on many factors. Namibia, for example, is rich in mineral resources, but its black majority is divided among many ethnic groups. Neither East Timor nor Croatia is so divided, but both are struggling to rebuild economies devastated by years of war.



Information About Three New Nations

Nation	Life Expectancy (years)	GDP per Capita	Population Below Poverty Line
Namibia	41	$7,200	50%
Croatia	74	$10,600	under 10%
East Timor	66	$500	42%

Infant Mortality (deaths per 1,000 births)	Ethnic Diversity	Freedom Index Ranking*	Year of Independence
70	black 88%, white 6%, mixed 6%	political rights, 2 civil liberties, 3	1990
7	Croatian 90%, Serb 4%, other 6%	political rights, 2 civil liberties, 2	1992
49	Austronesian, Papuan, small Chinese minority	political rights, 3 civil liberties, 3	2002

*In this scale, 1 represents the highest degree of freedom, and 7 the lowest.