

Developed or Developing? Dividing The World Into The Haves and The Have-Nots

First World or Third World? LDC or MDC? Global North or South?

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A woman talks on her cell phone as a passenger jet flies over the Jari Mari slum before landing in Mumbai, India. A country like India is not easily placed on the spectrum between MDC or LDC, Global North or Global South, and developed or developing.

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Mar 14 2010

The world is divided into those countries that are industrialized, have political and economic stability, and have high levels of human health, and those countries that do not. The way we identify these countries has changed and evolved over the years as we have moved through the Cold War-era and into the modern age; however, it remains that there is no consensus as to how we should classify countries by their development status.

First, Second, Third, and Fourth World Countries

The designation of "Third World" countries was created by Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer, in an article that he wrote for the French magazine, *L'Observateur* in 1952, after World War II and during the Cold War-era. The terms "First World," "Second World," and "Third World" countries were used to differentiate between democratic countries, communist countries, and those countries that did not align with democratic or communist countries. The terms have since evolved to refer to levels of development, but they have become outdated and are no longer used to distinguish between countries that are considered developed versus those that are considered developing.

First World described the [NATO](#) (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries and their allies, which were democratic, capitalist and industrialized. The First World included most of North America and Western Europe, Japan, and Australia.

Second World described the communist-socialist states. These countries were, like First World countries, industrialized. The Second world included the [Soviet Union](#), Eastern Europe, and China.

Third World described those countries that did not align with either the First World or Second World countries after World War II and generally described less-developed countries. The Third World included the developing nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Fourth World was coined in the 1970s, referring to the nations of indigenous people that live within a country. These groups often face discrimination and forced assimilation. They are among the poorest in the world.

Global North and Global South

The terms "Global North" and "Global South" divide the world in half both geographically with the Global North meaning all countries north of the equator in the [Northern Hemisphere](#) and the Global South being all of the countries south of the equator in the [Southern Hemisphere](#). This classification groups the Global North into the rich northern countries, and the Global South into the poor southern countries. This differentiation is based on the fact that most of developed countries are in the north and most of the developing or underdeveloped countries are in the south. The issue with this classification is that not all countries in the Global North can be called "developed" while some of the countries in the Global South can be called developed.

In the Global North, some examples of the developing countries include: Haiti, Nepal, Afghanistan, and many of the countries in northern Africa.

In the Global South, some examples of the well-developed countries include: Australia, South Africa, and Chile.

MDCs and LDCs

MDC stands for More Developed Country and LDC stands for Least Developed Country. The terms MDCs and LDCs are most commonly used by geographers. This classification is a broad generalization but it can be useful in grouping countries based on factors including their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) [per capita](#), political and economic stability, and human health, as measured by the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI). While there is debate as to at what GDP threshold an LDC becomes and MDC, in general, a country is considered an MDC when it has a GDP per capita of more than US \$4000, along with a high HDI ranking and economic stability.

Developed and Developing Countries

The most commonly used terms to describe and differentiate between countries are "developed" and "developing" countries. Developed countries describes the countries with the highest level of development based on similar factors to those used to distinguish between MDCs and LDCs, as well as based on levels of industrialization. These terms are the most frequently used and the most politically correct however, there is really no actual standard by which we name and group these countries. The implication of the terms developed and developing is that developing countries will attain developed status as some point in the future.