

Commonwealth is a term sometimes used for a state, a country, or a group of states and countries. Any group of nations may sign a treaty pledging political or economic support to one another and call themselves a commonwealth. The term originally meant a group of people banded together for the common good.

The United States may be called a commonwealth. The U.S. states Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Virginia, and Kentucky call themselves commonwealths. Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands are other U.S. commonwealths. The Commonwealth of Nations includes Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Contributor: Anthony D'Amato, Ph.D., Judd and Mary Morris Leighton Prof. of Law, Northwestern Univ. Law School.

See also COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS; COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES