**Resource Distribution and its Consequences**

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Resources are materials found in the environment that humans use for food, fuel, clothing, and shelter. These include water, soil, minerals, vegetation, animals, air, and sunlight. People require resources to survive and thrive.

**How are Resources Distributed and Why?**

Resource distribution refers to the geographic occurrence or spatial arrangement of resources on earth. In other words, where resources are located. Any particular place may be rich in the resources people desire and poor in others.

Low latitudes (latitudes close to the [equator](https://www.thoughtco.com/geography-of-the-earths-equator-1435536)) receive more of the sun's energy and much precipitation, while higher latitudes (latitudes closer to the poles) receive less of the sun's energy and too little precipitation. The temperate deciduous forest [biome](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-are-biomes-1435312)provides a more moderate climate, along with fertile soil, timber, and abundant wildlife. The plains offer flat landscapes and fertile soil for growing crops, while steep mountains and dry deserts are more challenging. Metallic minerals are most abundant in areas with strong tectonic activity, while [fossil fuels](https://www.thoughtco.com/where-are-fossil-fuels-found-1434558) are found in rocks formed by deposition (sedimentary rocks).

These are just a few of the differences in the environment that result from different natural conditions. As a result, resources are distributed unevenly across the globe.

**What Are The Consequences of Uneven Resource Distribution?**

**Human settlement and population distribution.** People tend to settle and cluster in places that have the resources they need to survive and thrive. The geographic factors that most influence where humans settle are water, soil, vegetation, climate, and landscape. Because South America, Africa, and Australia have fewer of these geographic advantages, they have smaller populations than North America, Europe, and Asia.

**Human migration.** Large groups of people often migrate (move) to a place that has the resources they need or want and migrate away from a place that lacks the resources they need. [The Trail of Tears](https://www.thoughtco.com/the-trail-of-tears-1773597), Westward Movement, and [the Gold Rush](https://www.thoughtco.com/the-california-gold-rush-1773606) are examples of historical migrations related to the desire for land and mineral resources.

**Economic activities** in a region related to the resources in that region. Economic activities that are directly related to resources include farming, fishing, ranching, timber processing, oil and gas production, mining, and tourism.

**Trade.** Countries may not have the resources that are important to them, but trade enables them to acquire those resources from places that do. Japan is a country with very limited natural resources, and yet is one of the richest countries in Asia. Sony, Nintendo, Canon, Toyota, Honda, Sharp, Sanyo, Nissan are successful Japanese corporations that make products that are highly-desired in other countries. As a result of trade, Japan has enough wealth to buy the resources it needs.

**Conquest, conflict, and war.** Many historical and present-day conflicts involve nations trying to control resource-rich territories. For example, the desire for diamond and oil resources has been the root of many armed conflicts in Africa.

**Wealth and quality of life.** The well-being and wealth of a place are determined by the quality and quantity of goods and services available to people in that place. This measure is known as the [standard of living](https://www.thoughtco.com/quality-of-life-1434450). Because natural resources are a key component of goods and services, the standard of living also gives us an idea how many resources the people in a place have.

It is important to understand that while resources are VERY important, it is not the presence of or lack of natural resources within a country that makes a country prosperous. In fact, some of the wealthier countries lack natural resources, while many poorer countries have abundant natural resources!

So what do wealth and prosperity depend on? Wealth and prosperity depend on: (1) what resources a country has access to (what resources they can get or end up with) and (2) what the country does with them (the efforts and skills of workers and the technology available for making the most of those resources).

**How has Industrialization Led to a Redistribution of Resources and Wealth?**

As nations began to industrialize in the late 19th century, their demand for resources increased and imperialism was the way they got them. Imperialism involved a stronger nation taking complete control of a weaker nation. Imperialists exploited and profited from the abundant natural resources of the acquired territories. Imperialism led to a major redistribution of world resources from Latin America, Africa and Asia to Europe, Japan, and the United States.

This is how industrialized nations came to control and profit from most of the world's resources. Since citizens of the industrialized nations of Europe, Japan, and the United States have access to so many goods and services, that means they consume more of the world's resources (about 70%) and enjoy a higher standard of living and most of the world's wealth (about 80%). Citizens of non-industrialized countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia control and consume far fewer of the resources they need for survival and well-being. As a result, their lives are characterized by [poverty](https://www.thoughtco.com/poverty-and-inequality-in-the-united-states-1147548) and a low standard of living.

This unequal distribution of resources, the legacy of imperialism, is the result of human rather than natural conditions.