

AP Human Geography: Political Organization of Space

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Key Takeaways: Political Organization of Space

1. A nation is a group of people with common cultural characteristics, whereas a state is an area with defined boundaries that has sovereignty within its borders. A nation-state is a country whose political boundaries correspond with its cultural boundaries.
2. Boundary disputes arise for various reasons. Some arise from the demarcation of the boundary, while others arise from the allocation of resources along the border.
3. Colonialism has had a profound impact on the world today. The major colonial powers in the western hemisphere were Great Britain, Portugal, Spain, and France.
4. There are five shapes to countries: compact, elongated, fragmented, perforated, and prorupted. Each of these has advantages and disadvantages.
5. The heartland theory established by Halford Mackinder suggests that whoever owns the heartland of Eastern Europe will control the world. The rimland theory developed by Nicholas Spykman suggests that sea power is more valuable and that alliances will keep the heartland in check. The domino theory, a response to the spread of communism, suggests that when one country falls, others around it will experience the same political instability.
6. Ethnicity is determined by race, skin color, language, religion, and other factors. Race is different from ethnicity and is determined by perceived inheritable biological characteristics.
7. Supranational organizations, such as the European Union and the United Nations, have a strong influence on the world's political climate.

Political Organization of Space Key Terms

The Impact of Political Geography

- **Political geography:** A branch of geography that studies geographical influences on political systems and power relationships.

- **Geopolitics:** The study of the interplay between international political relations and the territories in which they occur.
- **Core country:** A country that is well-developed with a strong economic base.
- **Periphery country:** A less-developed, economically poor country.

Understanding Political Geography

- **State:** A politically bound area controlled by an established government that has authority over its internal affairs and foreign policy. Synonymous with the term “country” (e.g., Iraq, South Africa, Canada).
- **Sovereignty:** The political authority of a state to govern itself.
- **Microstate (ministate):** A country that is small in both population and area.
- **City-state:** A small sovereign state that is made up of a town or city and the surrounding area.
- **Nation:** A group of people bound together by some sense of a common culture, ethnicity, language, shared history, and attachment to a homeland (e.g., the French, Koreans, Mexicans).
- **Stateless nation:** A nation of people without a state that it considers home (e.g., Kurds, Basques, Palestinians, the Hmong).
- **Nation-state:** A state in which the cultural borders of a nation correspond with the state borders of a country (e.g. Japan, Iceland, Denmark).

Boundaries

- **Political boundary:** An invisible line that marks the outer limits of a state's territory.
- **Frontier:** A zone of territory where no state has governing authority.
- **Geometric boundary:** A boundary created by using lines of latitude and longitude and their associated arcs.
- **Physical boundary:** A boundary based on the geographical features of the Earth's surface.
- **Ethnographic (cultural) boundary:** A boundary based on ethnographic and cultural considerations, such as language and religion.
- **Boundary evolution:** The technical wording of a treaty that legally defines where a boundary should be located. Delimitation: The process of mapmakers placing the boundary on the map.
- **Demarcation:** The process of physically representing a boundary on the landscape.
- **Border landscape:** The zonal area on both sides of the boundary.

- **Antecedent boundary:** A boundary that existed either before humans settled an area or very early during the settlement history.
- **Subsequent boundary:** A boundary that develops along with the development of the cultural landscape.
- **Superimposed boundary:** A political boundary that ignores the existing cultural organization on the landscape.
- **Irredentism:** A political movement by an ethnic group or other closely aligned group that aims to reoccupy an area that the group lost. The group's territorial claims are often based on national, historic, or ethnic affiliations.
- **Relic boundary:** A boundary that is no longer used but can still be seen on the landscape (e.g., the Great Wall of China).
- **Reunification:** The rejoining of two regions that were previously a single state (e.g., the reunification of East and West Germany).
- **Ethnic conflict:** Disagreements that often result in military action or violence of one ethnic group against another (e.g., the conflict in the Balkans with the Bosnian Muslims, Serbs, and Croats).
- **Religious conflict:** Conflicts that involve violence between members of different religious groups (e.g., Muslims and Hindus in South Asia).
- **Balkanization:** A contentious process of a state fragmenting into smaller states, which are often hostile or uncooperative with one another (e.g., the breakup of the former state of Yugoslavia).
- **Annexation:** The process of adding territory to an already existing state (e.g., the United States purchasing Alaska from Russia).
- **Definitional boundary dispute:** A dispute that arises due to the legal language of the treaty's definition of the boundary.
- **Locational boundary dispute:** A dispute that arises when the definition of the border is not questioned, but the interpretation of the border is in question.
- **Operational boundary dispute:** A dispute that occurs when two countries next to each other disagree on a major issue involving the border.
- **Allocational boundary dispute:** A dispute over the actual use of a boundary, such as the use of a resource that crosses the boundary. International Law of the Sea: Laws establishing states' rights and responsibilities concerning the ownership and use of the Earth's waters and their resources.
- **Exclusive economic zone (EEZ):** A sea zone over which a state has special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources stretching 200 nautical miles from the coast.
- **Median-line principle:** A line that is drawn in the water equidistant from each competing party to settle a question of sea resource access.

- **Global commons:** Areas in which no country has access or exclusive right to exploit natural resources (e.g., Antarctica).

Colonialism and Imperialism

- **Colonialism:** The practice of establishing political dominance over a people for economic, political, and territorial gain (e.g., European colonization of Africa).
- **Imperialism:** The practice of taking control of an area that is already politically organized.
- **Self-determination:** The power of a people to establish their own government the way that they see fit.
- **Suffrage:** The right to vote.
- **Enfranchisement:** The process of gaining the legal right to vote (e.g., the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 giving women the right to vote).

Democratization

- **Democratization:** The process of establishing representative and accountable forms of government led by popularly elected political representatives.

Shapes of Countries

- **Territorial morphology:** The study of states' shapes and their effects.
- **Compact shape:** The shape of a country in which the distance from the center of a state to any of its outer boundaries is roughly the same length (e.g., Poland).
- **Elongated shape:** Describes a country that has long and narrow land extensions (e.g., Chile).
- **Fragmented shape:** Describes a country that has two or more discontinuous, or separate, pieces of territory (e.g., Indonesia).
- **Perforated shape:** Describes a state that has a smaller state located entirely within it (e.g., Italy and South Africa).
- **Exclave:** A portion of a state that is geographically separated from the mainland by another country or countries (e.g., Alaska being separate from the U.S. mainland).
- **Enclave:** A country that is completely surrounded by another state (e.g., Vatican City).
- **Landlocked state:** A country that does not have direct access to the sea due to being surrounded by neighboring states (e.g., Bolivia).

- **Prorupted shape:** A country that is characterized by having a compact shape plus a large projecting landmass (e.g., Namibia).

The Political Organization of Space

- **Nationalism:** Doctrine based on the idea that an ethno-cultural group, or nation, has the power to control its own affairs.
- **Federal government:** A system of governing in which the central government shares authority with regional subdivisions (e.g., United States government sharing power with the 50 U.S. state governments).
- **Unitary government:** A system of governing in which a central government maintains control over the entire country (e.g., France).
- **Embassy:** A state's main diplomatic office in a foreign state.
- **Ambassador:** A state's chief diplomat, whose function is to represent the state in a foreign country.
- **Consulate:** An office similar to an embassy that serves a secondary role in a foreign country.
- **Supranational organization:** International bodies formed by three or more states to promote shared objectives (e.g., the United Nations).
- **United Nations (UN):** A global organization that provides a forum in which the states of the world can meet to discuss and vote on issues related to international issues such as political, social, legal, environmental, and military concerns.
- **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):** A military alliance originally created by 16 states, consisting of the United States, Canada, and 14 European countries, to counter the Soviet threat during the Cold War. Today, NATO still provides collective security to all of its member states.
- **Satellite state:** A country that is technically independent but under heavy political, economic, and military influence from another country (e.g., Eastern European states under Soviet influence during the Cold War).
- **Buffer zone (buffer state):** A region or state that provides territorial separation, or a “cushion,” between rivals.
- **Iron Curtain:** Barrier separating the former Soviet bloc and the West prior to the decline of communism in 1989.
- **Shatterbelt region:** A region such as a country or multiple countries caught up in a conflict between two superpowers (e.g., Vietnam during the Cold War).
- **Halford Mackinder:** A British political geographer who wrote a thesis outlining the heartland theory.

- **Heartland theory:** Suggests that whoever controls Eastern Europe and Western Asia has the political power and capital to rule the world.
- **Nicholas Spykman:** An American political scientist who countered Mackinder's heartland theory with an alternate theory called the rimland theory.
- **Rimland theory:** Claims that forming alliances and controlling the coasts and seas are necessary to maintain the political power to control the world.
- **Domino theory:** A Cold War-era theory that suggested that when one country experiences rebellion or political disunity, other countries around it will also experience turmoil as a result, leading to a domino effect of political instability in the region.
- **European Union (EU):** With nearly 30 member-states and a population of over 510 million, the EU's aim is to promote the free movement of people, goods, services, and economic capital; to enact legislation and administer justice for all members; and to maintain common policies on trade, development, and agriculture.

Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

- **Centripetal force:** An attitude or force that unifies people and increases support for a state; these forces keep the country together (e.g., national identity and patriotism).
- **Centrifugal force:** An attitude or force that pulls people apart; these forces can limit interaction, produce regionalism, and create dissimilarity among the citizens of a country (e.g., differences in religion and language).
- **National iconography:** Symbols of nationalism (e.g., national flags, national anthems, art).
- **Regionalism:** The expression of a common sense of identity and purpose combined with the creation of institutions that shape collective action within a geographical region.
- **Autonomous region:** A segment of a country that has some degree of self-governing authority granted to it by the state (e.g., Basque Country in Spain).
- **Theocracy:** A state whose government is under the control of a group of religious leaders (e.g., Iran, Vatican City).
- **Devolution:** The process of a state giving up of power over another state or region (e.g., the breakup of the Soviet bloc countries at the end of the Cold War).

Historical Geography of the United States

- **Historical geography:** A subset of geography that analyzes geographical patterns through history.
- **Immigrant state:** A country that is comprised primarily of immigrants and their descendants (e.g., the United States).
- **Confederation:** An association of sovereign states by a treaty or agreement.
- **Reapportionment:** The political process of reallocating the electoral seats to the regions of a state.
- **Gerrymandering:** A process by which a political party manipulates political boundaries for political gain.