The Shape of the Political Map

[Soviet] General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!

—President Ronald Reagan, speech, 1987

**Essential Question:** What social, historical, and economic factors have influenced modern political maps at various scales?

Empires and kingdoms were common in most of the world for the past two thousand years. However, global forces, wars, and changing ideas about political power, economics, and self-rule have reshaped the world map over the last 400 years.

The Structure of the Contemporary Political Map

People often use the words country, state, and nation to mean the same thing. But they have different meanings. Country is the most general term. It is often used to describe any political entity that is independent from the control of any other entity. State and nation have more precise meanings.

**Independent States as Building Blocks**

Political units exist at various scales. In the United States, for example, a person resides in several political units at once: maybe a town or city, a county, a state, and finally, in the country as a whole. Note that the term state can be confusing because it can be used in two different ways. In this example, it refers to one of the 50 states that make up the United States. But in the area of international relations, a state is the largest political unit, the formal term for a country. It meets the following criteria:

- has a defined boundary
- contains a permanent population
- maintains sovereignty over its domestic and international affairs
- is recognized by other states
The United States recognizes 195 states based on these criteria, but the number can vary depending on which government or international organization is making the list. These four requirements are easily defined, but in the geopolitical arena, they can be difficult to recognize.

Consider the complicated relationship between the People's Republic of China and the nearby island of Taiwan. In 1949, China ended a long civil war. The victorious communist forces led by Mao Zedong established their capital in Beijing. About two million supporters of the losing side, known as the nationalists, retreated to Taiwan. China was divided between two governments, one on the mainland and one in Taiwan, that each considered itself China's legitimate ruler. The government on the mainland never gave up its claim on Taiwan, and Taiwan never declared independence. Today, Beijing rules more than 1 billion residents. Taiwan rules about 24 million, but it manages its own affairs and has diplomatic relations with about 20 countries.

**Sovereignty**, the power of a political unit to rule over its own affairs, is a key principle in understanding how these units function. In order for a political unit to have legitimacy, it must have sovereignty. Sovereignty may be challenged on the global or local scale. China's claim that Taiwan is nothing more than a renegade province is a direct challenge to Taiwan's sovereignty. And since Taiwan is recognized by so few other states, it seems to be an effective challenge. (Largely because of China's opposition, Taiwan is not a member of the UN.) So, the case can be made that Taiwan does not fully meet the third and fourth criteria listed above.

**Types of Political Entities**

Often the term _nation_ is interchangeably used with _country_; however, the terms are not identical. In general, a nation is a group of people who have certain things in common:

- share a common cultural heritage
- have beliefs and values that help unify them
- claim a particular space based on tradition as their homeland
- desire to establish their own state or express self-determination in another way

Depending on how tightly one applies these standards, the number of nations ranges from a few hundred to several thousand. Many political entities combine aspects of nationhood and statehood.

**Nation-States** A singular nation of people who fulfill the qualifications of a state form a _nation-state_. Among the best examples of nation-states are Iceland and Japan. Icelanders make up 94 percent of its total population of 300,000. Scandinavian settlers founded Iceland on an island that had no indigenous population. Japanese account for 99 percent of the total population of its 128 million permanent residents. A strong national identity coupled with strict immigration policies have maintained Japan as a nation-state.
Multinational States  A multinational state is a country that contains more than one nation. Most multinational states consist of one dominant nation that controls most of the political power. Numerous multinational states fit these criteria, including Canada. While the English-language culture dominates, about 25 percent of Canadians speak French primarily. Most live in the province of Quebec. In an effort to prevent Quebec from demanding independence, the national government passed legislation making Canada a bilingual state and gave the province increased local autonomy in government and education.

Similarly, the Canadian government granted more autonomy over local affairs and natural resources to the indigenous nations. As part of this effort, it created the territory of Nunavut in 1999. Nunavut is in the far north of Canada. Over 80 percent of the population consider themselves Inuit.

Autonomous Regions  A defined area within a state that has a high degree of self-government and freedom from its parent state is sometimes known as an autonomous region. States often grant this authority to geographically, ethnically, or culturally distinct areas. For example, Åland is a group of islands in the Baltic Sea. It is part of Finland but lies near Sweden. Most residents are ethnically Swedish and speak that language. A desire to join Sweden after World War I was submitted to the League of Nations. The League ruled that Åland should remain part of Finland, but as a nonmilitarized, largely self-governing entity, which it still is today.

Stateless Nations  Since the world consists of far more nations than states, many nations do not have a state of their own, although they often have a political organization. These cultural groups that have no independent political entity are called stateless nations. Stateless nations seeking to become independent states include the Palestinians (Gaza Strip and Occupied West Bank) and the Basque (northeastern Spain and southwestern France).
The largest stateless nation belongs to the Kurdish people. Spread among six states in southwest Asia (Turkey, Armenia, Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Syria), the Kurds number between 25 million and 30 million people in an area called Kurdistan. As states such as Syria and Iraq became destabilized in the 2000s, ethnic Kurds intensified their push for their own independent country.

**THE KURDISTAN REGION**

**Multistate Nations** A multistate nation occurs when a nation has a state of its own but stretches across borders of other states. For example, most Hungarians live in Hungary, but many live in the Transylvania region of Romania. The Korean nation is divided primarily between two states—the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea)—but with large numbers in China and the United States.

**Evolution of the Contemporary Political Map**

Today’s world map includes nations without states, nations in multiple states, and states containing multiple nations. This mixture of situations reflects the evolution of politics, economics, and warfare over the last roughly 600 years.

**The Modern Nation-State Concept**

For most of European history, no relation existed between the language people spoke and the state to which they belonged. For example, most people who paid allegiance to the king of France in the 1500s did not speak French. Rather, they spoke a regional language. And people who spoke various forms of Italian in the 1600s did not assume that they should all be part of the same state. By the 1700s, the idea that people should live in nation-states had caught hold in some
areas, beginning in France and England. However, the map of Europe was still a patchwork of tiny states and a few large multi-ethnic empires (Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, etc.). The 1800s saw an explosion of nationalism in Europe. On the one hand, groups rebelled against being part of large empires that were controlled by another culture. On the other hand, divided groups, such as Germans and Italians, wanted to consolidate into unified countries.

**THE EIGHT INDEPENDENT ITALIAN STATES IN 1858**

![Map of The Eight Independent Italian States in 1858](image)

**Forces Unifying and Breaking Apart Countries**

One definition of nationalism is a nation's desire to create and maintain a state of its own. Since nationalism unifies people, it is an example of a centripetal force. Other centripetal forces include:

- a shared religion—Roman Catholicism unites Mexicans
- external threats—Estonians are united by fear of Russia
- a common language—Japanese share the same language

A counter to centripetal forces would be centrifugal forces. These are forces that “pull away from the center,” or ones that tend to break apart states or keep one from forming. Religion and language divide the people of Belgium. Most people in the north speak a Dutch language called Flemish and are historically Protestants, while people in the south speak French and tend to be of Roman Catholic descent.
Imperialism and Colonialism

Imperialism and colonialism are related ideas, but they are not the same. Imperialism is a broader concept: it includes a variety of ways of influencing another country or group of people, by direct conquest, by economic control, or by cultural dominance. Colonialism is a particular type of imperialism in which people move into and settle on the land of another country. Examples of imperialism and colonialism can be found throughout history and all over the world, but modern European imperialism and colonialism are the most relevant to the current political map. They occurred in two distinct waves.

Early Colonialism The first wave of European colonialism was led by Spain and Portugal, and then by France and Britain. These countries established large empires in the Americas, and they were motivated by “God, gold, and glory.” They wanted:

- religious influence by spreading their form of Christianity
- economic wealth from exploiting land, labor, and capital to enrich the home country
- political power by expanding their influence throughout the world

The European powers justified their conquests through the legal concept of Terra Nullius, a Latin phrase meaning “land belonging to no one.” According to this concept, they could legitimately seize “uncivilized land.” The result was the dispossession of indigenous people. The impact of this concept is still being redressed throughout parts of the world today.

Wars among empires influenced colonial claims. In the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763), known in North America as the French and Indian War, the British won control of Canada from France. However, the strain of paying for the war led to conflicts between Britain and its colonies, soon resulting in the American Revolution. U.S. independence then inspired similar movements in other colonies. By 1833, most of Latin America was free from European rule, and nationalism was spreading through the region.

Later Colonialism During the nineteenth century, the Spanish and the Portuguese empires declined, but other European countries launched a second wave of colonization. Led by Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Germany, this wave focused on controlling lands in Africa and Asia.

In 1884 and 1885, representatives from the major empires of Europe met in the German capital of Berlin to lay out claims made on the continent of Africa. The Berlin Conference (or sometimes known as the Congo Conference) used these claims to form state boundaries in Africa. These boundaries showed little regard to the existing ethno-linguistic, cultural, and political boundaries in place. As a result, one colony might include a patchwork of rival cultural groups, and one cultural group might be divided among multiple colonies.
Geopolitical Forces Influencing Today’s Map

While the European colonies in Africa and Asia did not last long, their legacy was strong. It can be seen in contemporary maps and the links among countries.

Modern Colonial Independence Movements

Colonists, inspired by nationalism, resisted the rule of Europeans, sometimes with violence. People in colonies wanted economic control over natural resources (petroleum, precious metals, and so on), free elections, and changes in society such as racial equality and religious freedom. The United Nations, created in 1945, supported the demands of subject people in colonies for self-determination. Within a century of the Berlin Conference, almost all European colonial territories had won independence, a process known as decolonization.

Many colonies gained independence politically, but not economically. Transnational corporations based in the former colonial powers continued to control the extraction of natural resources through mining and the cultivation of coffee, cacao, bananas, and other crops on plantations. A new form of colonization, called neocolonialism, emerged in which control over developing countries was exerted through indirect means, whether economic, political, or even cultural power.

Civil Wars in the Developing World

From 1960 through 1970, 32 colonial territories in Africa gained independence. However, since independence was won by colonies rather than by cultural groups, the boundaries imposed by Europe remained in the newly independent states. As a result, cultural boundaries and political boundaries did not match. Cultural conflicts within countries led to many civil wars. Then, because cultural groups spanned political borders, conflicts in one country often spilled over into other countries.

Among the worst of these wars was in Rwanda in 1994, which led to charges of genocide. Before colonization by Belgium, two rival ethnic groups, the Hutu and Tutsi, had competed for control of territory and resources. In 1961, Rwanda won independence. The Hutu majority won elections to govern the country, but the rivalry with the Tutsi continued. In April 1994, the Rwandan president, a Hutu, died when his plane was shot down. Although no one knew then who was responsible, Hutus exacted revenge by killing Tutsis and moderate Hutus on a vast scale. This type of mass, organized killing, in which people are targeted because of their race, religion, ethnicity, or nationality, is called genocide. Within just a few months, close to one million Rwandans were killed with many more migrating as refugees to neighboring countries.

This pattern of independence followed by civil wars and regional conflicts is nothing new to the political landscape. Serious problems result when national and ethnic rivals are forced to share political space because of boundaries.
drawn by outside powers. And in many cases, one ethnicity may be spread over several states, so a conflict in one state quickly escalates into a regional one. Today, many of the geopolitical “hotspots” in Africa and the Middle East are difficult to solve because of borders established long ago.

**The Cold War**

The **Cold War** was a period of diplomatic, political, and military rivalry between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union). It started at the end of World War II (1945), continued through the collapse of the Berlin Wall (1989), and ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union (1991).

Although the United States and the Soviet Union did not fight a direct war against each other, they fought several proxy wars (a proxy is a representative) in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. For the United States, the largest of these conflicts were in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. The superpowers wanted to extend their spheres of influence, the areas over which they had some degree of control. This meant winning allies in other countries and thwarting their rival from doing so. The American-Soviet contest often influenced the newly independent states emerging out of colonialism.

The frontline for the Cold War was in Europe. After the defeat of Nazi Germany, a tenuous peace divided Europe between East and West. The Eastern European countries liberated and occupied by the Soviet army became Soviet satellite states. This type of state is dominated by another state politically and economically. Attempts by Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 to break away from Soviet domination were put down with overwhelming force.
Germany’s status was complicated. In 1945, it was divided into four zones of occupation among the victorious powers: the United States, United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union. The first three of these zones united to form the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), which allied with the United States. The Soviet zone became the German Democratic Republic and allied itself with the Soviet Union.

The split in the country was repeated on a smaller scale in the city of Berlin. The city itself was located inside of the Soviet zone, but it was divided into four parts. The Soviet part became East Berlin. But the other three parts merged into West Berlin, which was part of West Germany, even though it was surrounded by East Germany.

**The Collapse of Communism**

In the late 1980s, new leadership in the Soviet Union began to relax its grip over its satellite states in Eastern Europe. Finally, in November 1989, citizens of both Germany brought down the wall that had divided the city of Berlin since 1961. In fact, within the next year and a half, Germany had reunited, and former satellite states of Eastern Europe were holding free elections without influence from the Soviet Union. But change in Europe did not end there.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union), a confederation of 15 republics, began to collapse as well. Eventually these 15 republics would become independent countries.
Newly Independent States

After 1990, the political boundaries were once again altered. The collapse of communism and the Soviet Union created an enormous power vacuum not only in Europe but also throughout the world. Most of Europe made a peaceful transition into the post-communist world. For example, in 1993, Czechoslovakia smoothly divided into the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia, an event known as the “Velvet Divorce.”

However, the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991 was complicated and violent. Long-standing ethnic tensions erupted. Hundreds of thousands died in clashes between Serbs, Bosnians, and others before a handful of independent countries emerged. Many died because of ethnic cleansing, the forced removal of a minority ethnic group from a territory. (The breakup of Yugoslavia as an example of balkanization is described in Chapter 11.)

Changes in the Balance of Power

The collapse of communism and the Soviet Union drastically changed the balance of power in Europe and throughout the world. Some former communist countries of Eastern Europe as well as some of the independent states have joined the European Union (see map below) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the western military alliance formed in 1949 to oppose Soviet military power in Europe. The balance of economic, political, and military power tilted toward Western Europe and the United States.

This shift frightened the Russians. They reacted by intervening militarily to support pro-Russian groups in the Republic of Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014).

THE GROWTH OF NATO, 1945 TO 2015
GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES: THE SHAPE OF THE UNITED STATES

The United States has been roughly the same size since 1867, when the country purchased Alaska. Since then, the United States has added important islands, including Hawaii and Puerto Rico, but all additions have been small in size. However, there is no guarantee that this stability will continue into the future.

Better Communication
One of the forces that might reshape the political map of the United States is technology. Computers, the Internet, and cell phones have increased the connections among people across space. Technology could be a centripetal force. As people communicate more closely across long distances, variations from region to region might diminish. The United States might become a more tightly united country, with less cultural variation than in the past.

Or the technology could be a centrifugal force. As Americans find people with whom they share interests and values in other places in the country, they could relate more to them than to the neighbors in their community. Place might become less important.

Movement of People
Migrations of people could also have mixed results for American political unity. The migration of people from one region to another could reduce regional variation in politics. For example, in most presidential elections in the past century, states in the Northeast and the Southeast have voted for opposing candidates. Will continued migration from the Northeast to the Southeast change this? Will the two regions become more similar politically, either because the migrants take their voting behavior with them or because the migrants adapt to the behavior of their new neighbors?

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY TERMS</th>
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<tr>
<td>state</td>
<td>nationalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>sovereignty</td>
<td>centripetal forces</td>
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<td>nation</td>
<td>centrifugal forces</td>
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<td>imperialism</td>
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<td>multinational state</td>
<td>colonialism</td>
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<td>autonomous region</td>
<td>Berlin Conference (Congo Conference), 1884</td>
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<td>stateless nation</td>
<td>decolonization</td>
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<td>multistate nation</td>
<td>neocolonialism</td>
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<tr>
<td>genocide</td>
<td>Cold War</td>
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<td>satellite state</td>
<td>ethnic cleansing</td>
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Territory, Power, and Boundaries

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland
Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island
Who rules the World Island commands the world.
—Sir Halford John Mackinder
British geographer, 1919

Essential Question: How do boundaries reflect ideas of territoriality and political power on various scales?

The concepts of power, territoriality, and boundaries are often intertwined and dependent on one another. Economic systems, cultural patterns and processes, and political systems have shaped various theories of how power is distributed on the political landscape. Physical geography and the natural landscape impact the distribution of power, the form and function of boundaries, and the morphology of political units. The forms of governance on international, national, regional, and local scales are products of both the human and physical landscapes.

Concepts of Political Power and Territoriality

Geopolitics is the study of the effects of geography on politics and relations among states. More than just political power, geopolitics also relates to trade, resource management, and the environment on a global scale. A key concept in geopolitics is territoriality, a willingness by one person or a group of people to defend space they claim. People express their territoriality when they influence others or shape events by asserting control over a space. Geographers use three theories to explain the distribution of power in the world.

Organic Theory
Among the first Europeans to systematically study why some states grew powerful while others were weak was Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904). He was trained as a biologist and influenced by the ideas of his contemporary, Charles Darwin. Ratzel viewed states as similar to living organisms, and believed that the forces of natural selection applied to relationships among them. Ratzel’s Organic Theory argues that states are born and that they need nourishment
and living space to survive. They obtain this living space, or *lebensraum*, usually by annexing territory from weaker states. But if a state stayed weak, other states, stronger and more vigorous, would seize its land. According to Ratzel, a state either had to grow or it would cease to exist.

Ratzel could support his Organic Theory by pointing to the westward expansion of the United States and the overseas colonization by Europeans. After Ratzel’s death, German Nazis used the idea of *lebensraum* to justify their plans to expand eastward into the farmland of Poland. These moves, along with efforts to annex parts of Austria and Czechoslovakia where many German-speaking people lived, led to World War II.

**Heartland Theory**

In the late nineteenth century, many Europeans saw the success of colonial acquisitions and concluded that countries derived power from controlling water routes in the ocean. A British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder (1861–1947), dissented. He developed the **Heartland Theory**, which argued that land-based power was essential in achieving global domination. Mackinder believed that establishing Eastern Europe led to control of the heartland (Eastern Europe plus Russia and Central Asia), which would lead to domination of the “world island” (Eurasia plus Africa), thus resulting in command of the world. He based his theory on a combination of beliefs and geographic facts:

- Improvements in land transportation—roads and railroads—enabled military forces to move as fast or faster on land as on water.
- Control over land was therefore much more important than maritime power.
- The heartland has large coal deposits and a wealth of other resources.
- The heartland is mostly landlocked, so it is well protected from naval attack.
- The only land route to invade the heartland is through Eastern Europe.
- The “world island” includes the majority of Earth’s land and population.

Mackinder’s theory factored into policy decisions of world powers for both world wars and the numerous Cold War conflicts.

**Rimland Theory**

Dutch-American Nicholas Spykman (1893–1943) created the **Rimland Theory**, which argued that power is derived from controlling strategic maritime areas of the world. The rimland comprises densely populated coastal areas that reside outside of the heartland. Spykman thought these areas were more crucial to worldwide power because they had more and more varied resources than the heartland—including people and access to the sea. He valued sea power more than did Mackinder.
Although Spykman died before the end of World War II, his writings influenced western policymakers throughout the Cold War. The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 and President Harry Truman’s policy of containing Communist expansion reflected Spykman’s beliefs. The Rimland Theory may best be described as the following:

“Who rules the rimland rules Eurasia;
Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the World.”

**THE WORLD ISLAND**

**Territoriality Connects Culture and Economy**

Defining territoriality may be easy, but applying it is complex. Under the influence of cultural forces and economic interests, people often disagree on how to allocate control of territories. Maps that show the boundaries of a state as clear, precise lines might suggest those boundaries are well-defined. However, people might hotly disagree over the boundaries, or simply ignore them in reality. Similarly, a state’s sovereignty might be well-established on paper, but people might not fully accept it.

One example of the connection of territoriality to culture is the relationship between Sunni and Shia Muslims. These two branches of Islam divided on the question of who should succeed Muhammad after his death in 632. They have remained divided ever since, a division that has sometimes contributed to violence. (See the map on the next page.)

In recent years, the conflict within Islam has been clearest in the rivalry between Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia and Shia-dominated Iran. Adding to the religious conflict between the countries is an ethnic difference: the Saudis are Arabs and the Iranians are Persians. Each country has tried to expand its power over territory, which has led to tension and instability.
Territoriality has always been closely connected to economic issues. In recent years, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, Taiwan, and China have claimed sovereignty over the Spratly Islands, an isolated group of islands in the South China Sea. Tensions run high on the subject in the region. But why are these countries seemingly willing to risk conflict over a group of islands, islets, and reefs? The answers are, in large part, economic:

- Experts believe that significant, but unconfirmed, petroleum reserves exist in the area.
- The region’s fishing grounds supply work and food for many in the entire region.
- Major international shipping lanes pass through the area.

As of 2016, each of the countries involved (except Brunei) occupied at least part of the island group. China was attempting to expand the size of its holdings through dredging and land reclamation, building up small reefs into full-fledged islands, from which, conceivably, to better push and/or enforce its claims of sovereignty.

**International and Internal Boundaries**

In theory, boundaries of all kinds exist to add clarity. They signal where people agree that one political entity ends or begins, helping people within them know what territory is theirs to administer and what is not. But when neighbors disagree on where the line separating them should be, boundaries become the subject of uncertainty. Throughout history, uncertain boundaries have been a frequent cause of bloodshed and war.
Categories of Boundaries

Boundaries represent changes in the use of space as one crosses from one side to the other. Crossing a boundary implies that some rules, expectations, or behaviors change. When moving across a formal international, national, or local boundary, these rules are referred to as laws.

Some very influential boundaries are not set formally. Informal boundaries include ones marking the spheres of influence of powerful countries in the world, and ones reflecting neighborhoods controlled by street gangs in a city.

Boundaries can be identified in various ways:

- A defined boundary is one established by a legal document such as a treaty that divides one entity from another (invisible line). The entity could range from a country to a single plot of real estate.

- A delimited boundary is a line drawn on a map to show the limits of a space.

- A demarcated boundary is one identified by physical objects placed on the landscape. The demarcation may be as simple as a sign or as complex as a set of fences and walls.

Political boundaries can be natural or geometric. A natural boundary is based on physical features to separate entities. For example, the Missouri River divides Iowa and Nebraska, and the Himalayan Mountains separate India and China.

In contrast to a natural boundary, a geometric boundary is a straight line drawn by people that does not follow any physical feature closely. On a large scale, a geometric boundary divides the countries of Libya and Egypt. On a small scale, a geometric boundary might divide two suburbs of a city.

Political boundaries are often precise. However, a cultural boundary is one based on human traits or behavior, so it often exists in the midst of a gradual change over space. For example, in China cuisine was once divided into two regions: wheat-based in the north and rice-based in the south. But no exact line ever divided the two regions sharply.

Limited Sovereignty and International Boundary Disputes

As the number of states has increased over the last century, so too have international boundary disputes. There are four main categories of boundary disputes: definitional (position), locational (territorial), operational (function), and allocational (resource).

Definitional boundary disputes occur when two or more parties disagree over how to interpret the legal documents or maps that identify the boundary. These types of disputes often occur with antecedent boundaries. One example is the boundary between Chile and Argentina. The elevated crests of the Andes Mountains serve as the boundary, but since most of the southern lands were neither settled nor accurately mapped, this territory lies in dispute.
Boundary disputes that center on where a boundary should be are known as **locational boundary disputes**. The post-World War I boundary between Germany and Poland was set by treaty. However, Germans disputed the location because many people who considered themselves ethnically German lived on the Polish side of the border. This led to a type of expansionism, **irredentism**, that occurs when one country seeks to annex territory in another because it has ties to part of the population that lives there.

An **operational boundary dispute** centers not on where a boundary is, but how it functions. As refugees fled the civil war in Syria that began in 2011, Europeans viewed their national boundaries differently. Some viewed the boundaries as lines where responsibility for helping refugees shifted from one country to another. Others viewed boundaries as barriers to keep refugees out.

When a boundary separates natural resources that may be used by both countries, it is referred to as an **allocational boundary dispute**. When it comes to natural resources, boundaries serve as vertical planes that extend both up into the sky and down into the earth. The extraction of subterranean resources extending on both sides of the boundary may become complicated and lead to conflict. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait because it claimed that the Kuwaitis were drilling too many wells and using oblique boreholes, thus breaking the vertical plane and extracting oil on the Iraqi side of the boundary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antecedent</td>
<td>A boundary drawn before a large population was present</td>
<td>The boundary between the United States and Canada along the 49th parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsequent (Ethnographic)</td>
<td>A boundary drawn to accommodate religious, ethnic, linguistic, or economic differences</td>
<td>The boundary between Northern Ireland (part of the United Kingdom) and the Republic of Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relic</td>
<td>A boundary that no longer exists, but evidence of it still exists on the landscape</td>
<td>The boundary between East and West Germany (states that are now combined)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superimposed</td>
<td>A boundary drawn by outside powers</td>
<td>The boundary between Mali and Mauritania (very common throughout Africa and Southwest Asia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militarized</td>
<td>A boundary that is heavily guarded and discourages crossing and movement</td>
<td>The boundary between North Korea and South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>A boundary where crossing is unimpeded</td>
<td>The boundaries between countries in Europe that signed the Schengen Agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Boundaries Influence Identity, Interaction, and Exchange

Boundaries, regardless of the type, can influence a state’s identity, interaction with neighboring countries and the international community as a whole, and the exchange of resources, goods and services, and people. These can result in positive or negative effects.

Extending a state’s boundaries or reacting to aggressive forces on a state’s boundaries can stir strong feelings of nationalism. Boundaries help establish a country’s reason for existence. Therefore, national identity can play an important role in how boundaries function.

Boundaries influence how people interact. Following the end of World War II in 1945, Europe had its most peaceful seven decades in the past seven centuries. One reason for this is that agreements among EU member states (and further agreements with non-EU states) made most of the continent effectively borderless. With goods and people flowing freely from one country to another, people seemed less willing to turn to violence to settle disputes.

In contrast to Europe, the Korean Peninsula has become sharply divided. In 1953, a truce ended combat in the Korean War. The two sides accepted a temporary military boundary that divided the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Though called the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the boundary became heavily militarized, and it now almost completely blocks the flow of trade and people (see photo below). Since the early 1960s, South Korea, using strong government support of its industries to produce goods for export, has transformed itself into a prosperous, democratic country. However, North Korea has become mired in poverty under an authoritarian government and isolated from most of the world.
The Law of the Sea

As earlier stated, a vertical plane extends above and below ground along a state’s boundary. Widely accepted by countries throughout the world, this principle defines airspace and subterranean space. However, how far horizontally out into the ocean should a country’s influence spread? Conflicts over the use of the ocean have been common in modern history. Only in the last half of the twentieth century were water boundaries addressed systematically. Between 1973 and 1982, the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea was signed by over 150 countries. It defined four zones as follows:

1. **Territorial Sea**: Up to 12 nautical miles of sovereignty; commercial vessels may pass, but non-commercial vessels may be challenged.

2. **Contiguous Zone**: Coastal states have limited sovereignty for up to 24 nautical miles, where they can enforce laws on customs, immigration, and sanitation.

3. **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**: Coastal states can explore, extract minerals, and manage up to 200 nautical miles.

4. **High Seas**: Water beyond the EEZ is open to all states.

If two coastal states share a waterway and are less than 24 nautical miles apart, then the distance between the two coasts is divided by half. For example, if only 20 miles of water separated two countries, then each would be entitled to 10 miles of territorial sea.

States that have islands have been granted vast areas of space. For example, if a country’s farthest island extends several hundred miles from the mainland, then the EEZ of that outward island extends that country’s claims by another 200 miles. For example, around Alaska, where islands extend far out in the Bering Sea, the EEZ of the United States is huge.

Disputes over territorial control in coastal waters can turn violent. In 1973, Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi extended his 12-mile territorial sea to include the entire Gulf of Sidra. He created a “line of death” that was not to be crossed. U.S. leaders considered the line a violation of the Law of the Sea, and U.S. Navy ships challenged the line by sailing through the gulf. In August 1981, while flying inside the line of death but outside the 12-mile limit, U.S. F-14 fighter jets engaged and shot down two Libyan fighter jets. Similar incidents between the United States and Libya occurred in 1986 and 1989.

**Voting Districts, Redistricting, and Gerrymandering**

International boundaries are important, but countries’ internal boundaries are as well. In representative democracies, citizens vote for leaders to govern on their behalf. At the national, state/provincial, and local levels, these elected officials represent citizens, known as the electorate, and are designated to defined districts with distinct boundaries.
In the United States, to ensure the districts have close to the same number of people, the Constitution requires the federal government to take a census, a count of the population, every 10 years. After the results of the census have been calculated, the national government determines each state’s number of representatives through reapportionment, changing the number of representatives granted each state so it reflects the state’s population. State legislatures then redraw district boundaries so that each district contains roughly the same number of people. This process is known as redistricting. The total number of representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives has been fixed at 435 since 1912. Regardless of reapportionment results, each state is guaranteed at least one representative.

This process often becomes filled with political maneuvering. Gerrymandering is the drawing of boundaries for political districts by the party or group in power to extend or cement their advantage. The term is derived in part from Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry (1744–1814). He influenced the drawing of districts in Massachusetts to benefit his own political party. A newspaper editor noted that an oddly shaped district resembled a salamander, and coined the term gerrymander. The process of gerrymandering has been used from the national scale, to influence Congressional districts (see map of Louisiana below), to the local scale, to influence city council districts.

LOUISIANA CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS
### Types of Gerrymandering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cracking</td>
<td>Dispersing a group into several districts to prevent a majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packing</td>
<td>Combining like-minded voters into one district to prevent them from affecting elections in other districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacking</td>
<td>Diluting a minority populated district with majority populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijacking</td>
<td>Redrawing two districts in order to force two elected representatives of the same party to run against each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnapping</td>
<td>Moving an area where an elected representative has support to an area where he or she does not have support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Effects of Boundaries

A boundary is more than a line between two political entities. It has effects that stretch well beyond simple questions of space and into political, cultural, and economic regions that affect various populations in various ways.

**Language and Religion**

Political boundaries often do not follow cultural and economic landscapes. Sometimes boundaries separate people who speak the same language, practice the same religion, or share other traits.

Other times, a region becomes a **shatterbelt**, one that suffers instability because it is located between two very different regions. Eastern Europe has historically been a shatterbelt between Western Europe and Russia. While Western Europe has historically been Roman Catholic or Protestant, Russia has been Orthodox. For most of the 20th century, Western Europe was generally capitalist, and Russia was communist. Other shatterbelts include the Caucasus mountain region and the Sudan.

As people move and boundaries change, so too does language. The language often changes because people separated by boundaries develop distinct dialects. When boundaries are placed in an attempt to unite people who have distinct dialects, the unification process proves to be difficult, as was the case with Italy. Italy did not become a unified state until the 1860s. Before unification, people spoke a variety of languages depending on where they lived. From the Alps in the north to Sicily in the south, no single language united everyone. Despite over 150 years as a single state, people in Italy remain only loosely bound together.

Religion and boundaries can make for a volatile mixture. Within the boundaries of India, most people are Hindus, but a large minority are Muslims. This division creates tension that sometimes leads to violence. However,
countries such as the United States and South Korea demonstrate that people of different faiths can live in harmony.

The division of Ireland demonstrates how complicated religion and boundaries can become. In the mid-twentieth century, most of Ireland won its independence from the United Kingdom and formed the Republic of Ireland, which was 95 percent Roman Catholic. However, a small area in the north, known as Northern Ireland, remained part of the United Kingdom. This area was only 35 percent Catholic—it was mostly Protestant.

The boundary between the Republic and Northern Ireland created two problems. On one hand, it divided the Catholics in the Republic and Northern Ireland who wanted to be together in one country. On the other hand, it united Catholics and Protestants into one political entity, Northern Ireland. There, Catholic-Protestant tensions—which included economic and political conflicts as well as religious ones—led to three decades of violence starting in 1968. Before peace was restored, about 3,000 people were killed in bombings and shootings.

**Ethnicity, Nationality, and Economy**

Boundaries, often ones that are superimposed or enforced by a dominant nation or ethnic group, can create conflict for nations occupying the same space. Sri Lanka, a large island off the southern tip of India, is home to two groups that see themselves as ethnically distinct from the other: the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Sinhalese are the majority. They are mostly Buddhist and they live in the southern part of the country. The Tamil minority are mostly Hindus, and they live in the northern and eastern parts of the island.

The Tamils long felt they were treated as second-class citizens by the Sinhalese. Hoping to win an independent homeland, Tamil rebels began fighting in the 1980s. They were defeated in 2009, but around 75,000 Sri Lankans had died in the fighting. It is not clear whether cultural differences between the two groups will lead to more violence, or whether advances in communication, travel, and trade will reduce the tension between them.

**Different Forms of Governance**

Countries are governed on more than one level. But different forms of governance allocate power in different ways, affecting how much authority is available at both the national and local levels.

**Federal and Unitary States**

Two main types of political spatial organizations are federal and unitary systems of governance. Both systems administer the day-to-day operations of governance with sovereignty, and the national government is the final authority. The differences between each are outlined in the chart that follows.
**FEDERAL VS. UNITARY STATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>Unitary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority of the Government</td>
<td>Shared between the central government and provincial, state, and local governments</td>
<td>Held primarily by the central government with very little power given to local governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy of Power</td>
<td>Multiple levels of power; power diffused throughout the hierarchy</td>
<td>No hierarchy of sovereign powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Country Where Commonly Used</td>
<td>Multiple ethnic groups with significant minorities</td>
<td>Few cultural differences and small minorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Local Powers Vary by Government Type**

In both federal and unitary states, local divisions of governance have some degree of power. But the amount of that power depends on the level of power exercised by the national government. Large landmass countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Russia, tend to be federal states. In contrast, smaller landmass countries, such as Japan, Egypt, and Spain, tend to be unitary states. These patterns have many exceptions. China is a large country with a unitary, very centralized government. Belgium is a small country that is a federal state, which reflects the ethnic divide between its Walloon and Flemish citizens.
States that use federal governance often do so to placate various cultural differences. Allowing local governments to manage their own affairs, such as education, helps keep the peace and maintain a sense of unity. Provinces in northern Nigeria have enacted sharia to accommodate the growing Muslim majority in that part of the country.

Unitary states have strong centralized governments that control almost all matters of governance. Provincial and local governments, in most cases, are simply extensions of the national government. Unitary states can be either undemocratic, such as China and Saudi Arabia, or fairly democratic, such as France and Indonesia.

**The Effects of State Morphology**

A state’s shape, or morphology, can influence how people in the state interact. In particular, if a country’s morphology includes a highly populated central region and outlying areas far from its center, then people in the outlying areas may face the following issues:

- might have difficulty receiving goods and services, especially if the infrastructure is inadequate
- might feel underrepresented in the government or more closely tied to neighboring countries
- might feel isolated from family members or ethnic groups who live far away
- might demand strong local control over natural resources in their region, which could lead to internal political conflict

**EXAMPLES OF STATE MORPHOLOGY**
## TYPES OF STATE MORPHOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morphology Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compact State</td>
<td>• Distance from center does not significantly vary</td>
<td>• Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Efficient in trade, travel, and communication from the center</td>
<td>• Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elongated State</td>
<td>• Potential isolation at the periphery</td>
<td>• Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Difficult communication and travel</td>
<td>• Malawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Challenging to govern and defend</td>
<td>• Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prorupted State</td>
<td>• Compact area with an extension</td>
<td>• India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Limited access</td>
<td>• Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proruption may cause disruption</td>
<td>• Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perforated State</td>
<td>• State that completely surrounds another state</td>
<td>• South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Surrounded state</td>
<td>• Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dependent on perforated state for travel and trade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmented State</td>
<td>• Scattered (islands) from the core</td>
<td>• Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Problems with trade, communication, travel, and distribution of power</td>
<td>• Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Patterns of Local and Metropolitan Governance

Local and metropolitan forms of governance—things such as municipalities, school districts, and regional planning commissions—are subnational political units that have varying degrees of local control.

Most people in the world are under the rule of overlapping levels of government. In the United States, there is one federal government, over 50 state, commonwealth, and territorial governments, and over 87,000 local governments. This last category includes roughly 3,000 counties, 20,000 cities, 16,000 townships, 13,000 school districts, and 35,000 special purpose districts such as police districts.

The number of units of government changes from year to year. One way this happens is that a city, to increase its individual and commercial tax bases,
might seek to add outlying territory to its domain. **Annexation** is the process of legally adding territory to a city. However, residents of a new residential development on what had been farmland might prefer to create their own town rather than being annexed by an existing city. This leads to a new city government—and increased competition for services, business, and taxes.

**GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES: UNITS OF GOVERNMENT**

Geographers study how political power is distributed across space at different scales:

- At the global scale, power is distributed among countries.
- At the national scale, power is distributed among units such as provinces or states.
- At the local scale, power can be distributed among several types of units: counties, cities, school districts, and others.

**Diverse Local Districts**

Some local districts have very specialized functions. They might fund fire protection or a public library. Illinois includes several mosquito abatement districts. The Des Plaines Valley Mosquito Abatement District includes 77 square miles in the western suburbs of Chicago. It has about five full-time employees and hires another two dozen or so workers seasonally.

Mosquito abatement districts are one reason that Illinois leads all other states in the number of units of local government. In 2013, Illinois had 6,963 units of government. A typical resident lived with six or more layers of local government. In second place was Texas, with 5,147 units. However, the population of Texas is more than double that of Illinois.

**How to Distribute Power**

Mosquito abatement districts highlight the issue of the best way to distribute power spatially. Many problems, such as mosquitoes and the diseases they spread, drug trafficking, and pollution, pay no attention to political boundaries. One response to these types of problems is to create special districts to address these problems. Another is to build cooperation among existing units of government. A third is to refer the problem to a higher level of government such as a state or national agency. Deciding where to locate the power to respond to these problems is a constant issue for debate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY TERMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>geopolitics</td>
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<tr>
<td>territoriality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organic Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartland Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rimland Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defined boundary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delimited boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>demarcated boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>natural boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>geometric boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>antecedent boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>subsequent boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>relic boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>superimposed boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>militarized boundary</td>
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</table>
Globalization

Globalization has produced a new level of interdependence among us. The economy and multinational supply chains do not abide by political boundaries. A computer ordered in Brazil is designed in California and assembled in several other countries. Economic integration was the first strong evidence of a new era.

—Eduardo Paes, Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Essential Question: How has globalization changed the way people live?

A network is a good example of a network, a set of interconnected entities, sometimes called nodes, without a center or a hierarchy. The world is full of networks in transportation, communication, trade, social media, beliefs and values, and politics.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, advances in communication, trade, and travel created networks around the world. One significant result is increased interactions on an international scale. Globalization is the integration of markets, states, communication, and trade on a worldwide scale. While these forces have brought people and systems closer, they have also put a strain on the sovereignty of states. This in turn has led to a race in the creation of special alliances. Globalization has created the necessity for alliances for collective benefits on a global scale. In addition, economic networks between consumers and producers have changed dramatically as a result of globalization.

Globalization Challenges State Sovereignty

The sovereignty of states in the modern age of globalization has been challenged in many ways. Political borders have become less significant as ideas flow more rapidly among most countries, trade in goods is freer than in the past, and even people can travel easily in areas such as Europe. The state system has attempted to adapt to these changes, but the speed at which these changes occur often outpaces states’ attempts to keep up. Similarly, social, economic, and environmental forces have had difficulty in maintaining pace with the forces of globalization.
The Arab Spring, a movement of pro-democracy demonstrations and rebellions that began in late 2010, provides a good example of how rapidly ideas can spread. It began with antigovernment demonstrations in Tunisia. But, aided by social media, protests spread quickly throughout North Africa and the Middle East, leading to turmoil throughout the region.

**Supranationalism**

Supranationalism occurs when multiple countries form an organization to collectively achieve greater benefits for all members. Sometimes, countries sacrifice a degree of sovereignty by accepting the regulations or decisions of the supranationalist organization. These organizations are often formed to create a military alliance, promote trade, or combat an environmental problem.

Among the first modern supranational organizations was the League of Nations, founded after World War I. Without the United States as a member, and without strong support from other large countries, the League failed. However, it provided the inspiration for a more effective organization, the United Nations, which was founded after World War II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Nations (UN), 1945</td>
<td>193 countries</td>
<td>Taking on issues facing humanity such as peace and security</td>
<td>New York City, United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1949</td>
<td>United States, Canada, Iceland, Western and Central Europe, and Turkey</td>
<td>The mutual defense of member states</td>
<td>Brussels, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union (EU), 1993</td>
<td>28 members mostly in Western and Central Europe</td>
<td>The political and economic integration of member states</td>
<td>Brussels, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), 1994</td>
<td>United States, Canada, and Mexico</td>
<td>Free trade among members</td>
<td>Washington, DC; Ottawa; and Mexico City</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economic Supranationalism**

The most common reason for multiple states to participate in a collective cause is economics. Among the supranational economic organizations are the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).
Seeking mutually beneficial trade agreements has fostered economic growth for member states of such economic supranationals. Together, the nations of ASEAN, for example, had the second-fastest growing economy in Asia—well ahead of regional powerhouses such as Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia.

The rise of **transnational corporations**, companies that conduct business on a global scale, has dramatically weakened state sovereignty. In contrast to corporations based in a single country, transnationals have no strong connection to any one place. As a result, they can move jobs from one country to another in order to take advantage of lower wages, lower taxes, or weaker laws on worker safety and environmental protection. Their ability to move operations around the world makes them less influenced by any single country.

The cost advantages of conducting economic activity on such a large scale, known as the **economy of scale**, affects trade just as it does other economic activity. As a result of the unprecedented competition for trade at a global scale, more and more transnational corporations have merged with other transnational corporations to create larger businesses and also fewer competitors. The two most common types of mergers (or integrations) are horizontal integration and vertical integration:

- **A horizontal integration** occurs when a corporation merges with another corporation that produces similar products or services. An example would be the merger in 2016 of Abbott Laboratories and St. Jude Medical. This merger expanded the new corporation’s control over a broader segment of the medical devices market.

- **A vertical integration** occurs when a corporation merges with another corporation involved in different steps of production. An example of vertical integration is the Spanish clothing company Zara. Zara owns companies that manufacture the clothes as well as the retail chains that sell the clothes to consumers. Zara thus owns its **supply chain**, a network of companies around the world that produce, transport, and distribute a final product. This gives the corporation greater control over more steps in the production process, which increases its ability to make profits.

In the years following World War II, European countries began to eliminate national barriers to trade and travel on the continent. They reduced tariffs (taxes on trade), established one common set of regulations on products to replace individual national regulations, and coordinated labor policies. Leaders hoped that closer economic and cultural ties would bring peace to a region ravaged by war for centuries. The two major steps to overcome nationalism were the formation of the European Union (EU) in 1993, and establishment of a common currency (the euro) in 1999.

The result of these changes provided European corporations with easy access to a large market—one that included far more people than the U.S. market—in which to sell their products. Success in Europe helped EU-based companies compete in the global marketplace.
The success of the European Union inspired the creation of other regional, economic supranational organizations such as the aforementioned North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In 1993, the governments of the United States, Canada, and Mexico signed this economic treaty in order to compete in a rapidly changing and extremely competitive global market.

However, economic supranationalism leads to problems as well as benefits. The transfer of jobs to inexpensive labor markets, the possibility of questionable quality of production, and the skirting of some members’ safety and environmental regulations are primary concerns for member states.

While the EU and NAFTA are regional trading blocs, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) focuses on the production of petroleum. Its mission is to coordinate and unify its members’ petroleum policies in order to stabilize oil markets. Membership spans three continents, including countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Indonesia, Venezuela, Nigeria, and Iran. Ensuring a steady income for its members influences the quantity of oil supplied to the global market. Sometimes conflicts arise between the members. For example, one country may want to curtail production in order to generate more revenue, while another member may want to increase production to generate more jobs.

**Military and Strategic Supranationalism**

Another example of supranationalism is military cooperation through mutual defense alliances. One such alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was created in 1949 in response to tensions between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union. NATO is the largest military alliance in the
world. While NATO has never confronted the Soviet military directly, it did use its power to stabilize conflicts in the Balkans during the 1990s.

After the Cold War ended, several former allies of the Soviet Union in Central and Eastern Europe joined NATO. The first were the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999. Their strategic shift angered Russia, and renewed tension between NATO and Russia.

Supranationalism and the Environment

As the world progresses through the 21st century, the environment has become one of the biggest challenges facing states, supranational organizations, and transnational corporations. Most transnational corporations are based in the economic core—the countries of the developed world. However, much of the production and manufacturing occurs in the economic periphery—countries of the developing world—in order to minimize labor, land, and resource costs. This creates tension. In wealthy countries such as the United States, workers resent seeing their jobs sent overseas.

In poorer countries, people have different concerns. Countries make different economic decisions based on the options they have. A wealthy country may reject an environmentally damaging facility, but a poorer country, more in need of jobs and development, might be willing to accept the costs to its environment and the health of its people.

As a result of lax environmental regulations in periphery countries, transnational corporations often pollute the air, water, and soil. To further exacerbate this problem, neighboring states are subject to this pollution as well. The largest supranational organization, the United Nations, has attempted to resolve some of these issues through the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, and the World Meteorological Organization.

Forces Leading to Devolution

Devolution, the transfer of political power from the central government to subnational levels of government, mostly follows regional lines. The division of powers (administrative, judicial, and legislative) are divided among the national government and subnational levels such as provincial, regional, and local governments. This division varies among countries and is influenced by whether the state has a unitary or federal system (see Chapter 10). Forces that lead to or accelerate devolution are physical geography, ethno-linguistic divisions, terrorism, economic factors, and social conditions.

Physical Geography

While globalization promotes connections, the physical geography of a region can cause isolation and increase the likelihood of devolution. The Kashmir region of northern India and northern Pakistan has been and still is a region of conflict. The Pir Panjal and Himalayan mountain ranges can cause people
in these regions to feel isolated. Areas claimed by India, China, and Pakistan have had some local autonomy because of the geographical isolation caused by these mountain ranges. Other physical features that have reduced contact among groups of people include deserts, plateaus, and large bodies of water.

**Ethnic Separatism**

Many ethnic separatist movements throughout the world take place within specific regional lines within states. Ethnic groups and minorities are often concentrated in specific regions, which can lead to independence movements. In order to maintain unity, the central government will grant more authority to these ethnic regions.

Such has been the case in Spain with the Basques and Catalans, two culturally and linguistically distinct groups within Spain. The intensity of their separatism is tied to actions by the central government of Spain. For example, if the national government imposes more restrictions throughout the country, then the Basques and Catalans may intensify their desire for independence. If the national government allows more local autonomy, it hopes that the desire for independence for the Basques and Catalans will subside.

**Terrorism**

Terrorism is organized violence aimed at government and civilian targets that is intended to create fear in furtherance of political aims. It is most commonly used by non-governmental groups that do not have an army.

Ethnic separatists sometimes employ terrorist tactics in hopes of achieving devolution. Since its inception in 1959, the Basque nationalist/separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) has fought for independence from Spain. Increased repression and frustration spurred the ETA to wage a campaign of violence beginning in 1968. After more than 820 deaths, the ETA declared a permanent cessation of armed activities in 2011. The ETA still seeks the Basque area’s independence from Spain.

On a global scale, terrorism often has its roots in specific regions or countries. Terrorist groups seeking power and recognition within a country can expand their operations across international borders and even on a global scale. Al Qaeda has its roots among Sunni Muslims fighting against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. However, in 1996, Al Qaeda directed its aggression towards the United States to protest U.S. support of Saudi Arabia and Israel. A series of attacks in eastern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula in the 1990s culminated in the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

**Economics**

Control of natural resources such as mineral deposits can prompt regions of countries to advocate for devolution. People in one region might want to use locally produced wealth for local benefits, such as better schools, infrastructure,
and healthcare—or simply to lower taxes. The central government might argue that these resources should benefit the entire country.

Many tribal groups in the Amazon River basin of Brazil object to the extraction of resources and the development of the rainforest without local communities benefiting and being a part of the decision-making process. In Scotland, revenues from North Sea oil helped to fuel talk of independence from the United Kingdom. In 2014, Scotland narrowly voted to remain part of the United Kingdom.

**Social Issues**

Social devolutions often follow geographic divisions between religious, linguistic, and historical regions. Countries experiencing social devolution usually have concentrated pockets of a specific religion or distinct spoken language by the local inhabitants. Federal systems, as in the United States and Canada, allow local governments to maintain their distinct languages and religions.

The situation in Belgium, in northwestern Europe, is quite different. As the bilingual sign below reflects, the country is split into the Flemish-speaking north (Flemish is similar to Dutch), called Flanders, and the French-speaking south, called Wallonia. As a result of linguistic, cultural, and economic differences, the country is sharply divided. Each region has its own institutions and many people identify themselves as Flemish or Walloon, rather than Belgian. The future of Belgium as a single country is in doubt.

![Bilingual Sign in Belgium](image)

**Irredentism**

As mentioned in Chapter 10, irredentism is a movement to unite by people who share a language or other cultural elements but are divided by a national boundary. One example of irredentism comes from the Caucasus Mountains region. Under the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh was an Armenian-majority region within Azerbaijan. However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh demanded that they be allowed to join the
country of Armenia (which supported their demands). Azerbaijan refused, and war broke out. It is estimated that 30,000 people died before a cease-fire took hold in 1994. In theory, a new state was created, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. In practice, the new state became part of the country of Armenia.

Devolution and Fragmentation

As previously stated, devolution is the transfer of power from the central government to lower levels of government. However, when devolved powers lead to more autonomy, regions may seek independence, thus causing fragmentation of the state. When this fragmentation occurs, the state fractures along regional lines.

Autonomous Regions

Autonomous regions have their own local and legislative bodies to govern a region with a population that is an ethnic minority within the entire country. Though these regions handle their own day-to-day governance, they are not fully independent from the state in which they are located. Many of these regions, such as the Navajo Nation in the United States, reflect the heritage of an indigenous population. Some, such as the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in far eastern Russia are based on religion. Jews began settling in the area in the 1920s. Both federal states, such as India, and unitary states, such as China, include autonomous regions.

Subnationalism

People in autonomous regions usually have a great deal of local power, but give their primary allegiance to the national state. In contrast, subnationalism describes people who have a primary allegiance to a traditional group or ethnicity. Many French-speaking people in the province of Quebec, Canada, are subnationalists. They feel a stronger loyalty to Quebec than to Canada. In 1995, advocates of independence for Quebec narrowly lost a popular vote on the issue. Quebec remained part of Canada.

Many countries include several subnational groups as a result of wars, shifting borders, and movement of people. These groups have had various types of goals:

- Equality: In France, citizens of North African ancestry have fought for changes in the law that they argue discriminate against them.
- Independence: In far western China, some members of the Uyghur ethnic group have advocated seceding from China to form a new country, East Turkestan.
- Changing Countries: In eastern Ukraine, many Russian-speaking citizens felt closer ties to Russia than to the rest of Ukraine. Russia invaded and claimed control of this region in 2014. Several thousand people died in the fighting.
Balkanization

Sometimes an entire country or region explodes in ethnic conflict, as the Balkan Mountains region in southeastern Europe did in the early 1900s and again in the 1990s. The rugged mountains of the area made communication difficult, so the region developed a high density of distinct cultural groups: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bulgars, Romanians, and others. In the early 1900s, several of these groups demanded independence from the Austrian and Ottoman empires that controlled the region. In the 1990s, following the fall of communism, conflicts resumed. Today, balkanization means the fragmentation of a state or region into smaller, often hostile, units along ethno-linguistic lines.

Impact of Technology

The Internet, social media, and the ease of jet travel have had varied effects on how people relate to each other around the world. They have:

- promoted globalization by connecting people across boundaries
- weakened globalization by helping subnational groups to organize
- supported democratization, the transition from autocratic to more representative forms of politics, by helping reform movements to communicate in China, Iran, Egypt, and other countries where the government has tried to limit the spread of information
- created a digital divide between countries with and without access to information for either political or infrastructure reasons
- increased time-space compression, the social and psychological effects of faster movement of information over space in a shorter period of time

Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces

As defined in Chapter 9, centrifugal forces divide the citizenry in a country while centripetal forces unite a country’s population. Often, an action has potential to be both types of forces at once. For example, a political election can unite people behind a leader—or divide people bitterly.

Centrifugal Forces

Regionalism, the belief or practice of regional administrative systems rather than central systems, is a political factor that plays a role in creating centrifugal forces. Often a minority population is concentrated in various pockets of a state, thus resulting in minority self-awareness.

When a segment of a state’s minority population feels underrepresented and lacking political power, it might pursue a path of separation from the larger state. Again, Canada provides a good example. The country’s French-speaking population, concentrated in southern Quebec, has pursued more empowerment over local governance such as education and administrative governance,
including its judicial system. However, for some French-speaking Canadians in Quebec, this is not enough; therefore political centrifugal forces still exist.

On the economic side, globalization has widened the gap between the rich and poor within a state. For example, India is an emerging economic power, but it is not a strongly united country. Uneven development within a country may lead to divisions between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Uneven development results in uneven benefits, which may result in the separation and fragmentation of a state. Despite rapid economic growth on a global scale, India still has large segments of its population living in abject poverty. This poverty is divided along regional lines.

**REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF POVERTY IN INDIA**

Centrifugal cultural forces have intensified as a result of globalization. Declining state sovereignty and economic advances have empowered ethno-national groups to demand more autonomy. For example, fragmentation within Syria and Iraq gave rise to Kurdish independence movements in those countries.
Centripetal Forces

Governments, religious groups, and other institutions use a combination of methods to promote unity in a society. Some focus on political identity, others on economic development, and still others on cultural practices.

Political Identity Governments attempt to build political unity in several ways:

- Unifying institutions, such as schools, promote social cohesion by educating students on the historical accomplishments of the state. Unifying institutions may also promote holidays that are historically significant, such as an independence day or a day to honor veterans.
- Nationalism, the strong feelings of patriotism and loyalty one feels towards one’s country, promotes a sense of belonging, even if a country’s population is an ethnically diverse one.
- The acceptance of rules or laws and the promotion of political equality help to reinforce political centripetal forces. Examples of this are governmental administration practices such as a fair legal and judicial system and protection of the populace by the government.
- Customs and rituals based on citizenship are a common way to promote a sense of common identity. In the United States, public school students throughout the country recite the Pledge of Allegiance each day.

Economic Development One of the most effective centripetal forces used by governments throughout history has been building infrastructure. Efficient transportation systems and well-constructed roads and railways increase and promote trade, communications, dependence, and other forms of connections among the population within a state. These can increase the overall wealth of the country. However, since they commonly help one region or one group of people more than others, they can also lead to greater conflict.

Improvements in transportation are one way to promote unity by increasing interaction among different ethno-linguistic groups. In addition, advances in communication and trade help to eliminate social barriers within a country, thus encouraging solidarity among the citizens of the state. An example of this concept would be how goods, workers, and students flow freely across the borders of European Union member states.

Cultural Practices States with a population that is homogeneous, one that shares a common trait, likely have cultural practices that function as centripetal forces. For example, in heavily Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, Ramadan is a month-long religious observation that helps to unite the overall population. Japan, which has preserved a homogeneous culture by maintaining restrictive immigration policies, has strong cultural centripetal forces such as a common language and a shared sense of history.
GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES: THE NEW GLOBAL WORLD

In an age of globalization, every problem has ripple effects in other countries. In particular, the policies of the financially powerful core states about money have large spillover effects on the semiperiphery and periphery economies of the world. Geographers study how these effects diffuse from one place to another, and how globalization can make them more or less damaging.

Thailand’s Fragile Prosperity
In 1997, a crisis in one country in the periphery, Thailand, threatened first that country, then its neighbors, and eventually the rest of the world. Thailand’s economy had been growing an impressive 10 percent per year for over a decade. However, it relied heavily on foreign investments, particularly from the United States and Japan, and high exports. When investors began to fear that the economy was not as strong in reality as it looked on paper, they began to pull back. When the Thai economy started to slow, concern quickly spread. The Thai stock market crashed, and the currency lost its value.

Diffusion and Distance Decay
What followed was the runaway hierarchical and contagious diffusion of market disturbances from one country to another. In line with the concept of distance decay, the ripple effect of Thailand’s financial crisis hit its neighbors the hardest—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and South Korea. The interdependent economies of these countries then faced similar financial woes. This crisis threatened to spread beyond the Asian markets and create a global economic panic.

The Role of Globalization
This crisis—made worse by globalization—stopped when an institution of globalization stepped in. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), a global non-governmental organization, offered loans to the weakening economies. With these loans, confidence was restored and the economies began to grow again.

KEY TERMS

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<th>networks</th>
<th>devolution</th>
<th>democratization</th>
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<tr>
<td>globalization</td>
<td>terrorism</td>
<td>time-space compression</td>
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<tr>
<td>supranationalism</td>
<td>autonomous regions</td>
<td>regionalism</td>
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<td>horizontal integration</td>
<td>subnationalism</td>
<td>nationalism</td>
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<td>vertical integration</td>
<td>balkanization</td>
<td>homogeneous</td>
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<td>transnational corporation</td>
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