

GEOG 247 Cultural Geography

The Geopolitics of Culture 1

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The Geopolitics of Culture

- ❖ **Political geography is the spatial study of politics and political matters** including the organization and distribution of political phenomena.
- Political geographers** study how **people** have:
 - ✓ organized the land surface into countries and alliances,
 - ✓ reasons underlying those arrangements,
 - ✓ the conflicts that result from the organization.
- Human cultural characteristics such as **ethnicity, religion and linguistics** are intertwined with the division of the world into political units.

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Political Map of the World



- The earth is divided into over 200 major political units.
- Most are **self-governing states** but there are numerous **semi-autonomous units**, as well as areas **not recognized as being self-governing**.
- *Analysts feel that this number will continue to increase as small areas achieve independence, large states break up, and ethnic groups claim autonomy.*

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KEY TERMS

- ❖ **State:** **Centralized authority that enforces a single political, economic, and legal system within its demarcated boundaries. Often a synonym for "countries."**
- ❖ **Sovereignty:** The **right of people** living in individual states **to control political and economic affairs** within their boundaries without external interference.
- ❖ **Territoriality:** **A created cultural response or concept**, rooted in Europe, that has produced the characteristics of modern states.
- ❖ **Colonialism:** The building, controlling and maintaining of outposts in one territory by people based elsewhere; the forceful appropriation of a territory by a distant state.

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National Political Systems: Evolution of the Modern State

Political organization of space arose independently in many parts of the world.

- Idea of the **modern state** was developed by European political philosophers in the 1700s:

*Concept that people **owe allegiance to a state and the people it represents - NOT to its leader**, such as a king or feudal lord that had been the case for thousands of years.*

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The Chinese Empire over 3000 years



Sequence shows area from 1000 BCE to the present

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Challenges to the State: New Viewpoints from World Culture

State-centric view of the world is being tested from many angles as a “world culture” evolves:

- ✓ **Globalization** of economies and **transnational** corporations
- ✓ Proliferation of **international and supranational institutions**
- ✓ Emergence and multiplication of **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs)
- ✓ **International migrations**; ease and speed of travel
- ✓ Increase in **nationalist and separatist movements**
- ✓ **Social media** and the diffusion of information

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KEY TERMS

Nation:

1. An independent political unit holding sovereignty over a territory.
2. Community of people with a common culture and territory.

❖ **Usage in Cultural Geography:**

A **group of people** with a **common culture** occupying a **particular territory**, and **bound together** by a strong sense of unity arising from **shared beliefs and customs**.

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KEY TERMS

Nation-state:

A state whose area coincides with the area occupied by a **distinct nation or people**, or at least, whose population shares a general sense of cohesion and adherence to a set of common values

It is the goal of every group of people (culture) to govern themselves.

Very few countries can claim to be true nation-states. Japan, Poland, Egypt, Bangladesh, Iceland, Lesotho, Mongolia, Swaziland all have between 93-99% ethnic homogeneity.

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Nation-State

The key to nation-state designation is **commonality** the shared values of a group of people.

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MORE KEY TERMS

Bi-national or multi-national state:

- Contains more than one nation, e.g., Switzerland, Canada

Part-nation state:

- Single nation dispersed across and predominant in two or more states, e.g., the Arab nation

Stateless nation:

- People without a state, e.g., the Kurds, Roma, Basques and Palestinians

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Classification of States and Distribution by Type

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Relationship between States and Nations

A. Poland is a **nation-state**. Nearly all its citizens are of Polish ethnicity.

B. Switzerland is a **multi-national state**. Large ethnic German, Italian and French populations have a strong sense of Swiss nationalism.

C. The Arab nation, as a group of people, extends across and **dominates 17 countries** in N. Africa and the Middle East. It is considered a **part-nation**.

D. The Kurds are a **stateless nation** who are weakened by their minority status -- **spread over 6 countries**.

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Spatial Organization of Territory

Centripetal vs Centrifugal Forces

Cultural factors have an influence as to whether or not a territory becomes cohesive and becomes a nation-state or stateless nation.

- ❖ **CENTRIPETAL FORCES:** Factors that support a country's national unity.
- ❖ **CENTRIFUGAL FORCES:** Factors that disrupt a country's national unity or internal order.

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Centripetal Forces: Cultural Factors that Support National Unity

Nationalism is a cultural attribute.

The sense of belonging and self-identification with a national culture. Recognition of the state and acceptance of national goals.

- **Strengthens** the political system.
- **Integrates** different groups into a unified population.

➢ **What are some of the strengthening factors?**

- ✓ **Symbols** (icons) are used to promote nationalism.
- ✓ **Unifying institutions** exist as schools, armed forces and maybe a state church.
- ✓ **Organization and administration** is identified/accepted by all.
- ✓ **Interaction is supported** by good transportation and communication.

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Cultural Centrifugal Forces: Challenges to State Authority

Religion

- May compete with state for people's allegiance.
- Conflict between majority and minority faiths may destabilize social order.
- Opposing sectarian views within a single dominant faith may promote civil conflict.

Separatist Movements

- Unwillingness to assimilate or find points of agreement
- Espouse a different or contrary point of view: *linguistic, economic, religious.*
- Wanting to be part of one's homeland located in another political unit.
- Rebelling against repression or lesser status.

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Cultural Centrifugal Forces: Nationalism as a Negative Variable

❖ **Nationalism can also be a challenge to unity within a political unit and be a very disruptive force.**

There are 5 aspects identified:

A. Sub-nationalism
Feeling that one owes primary allegiance to a traditional group (nation) rather than to the state.

B. Right to self-determination
Feeling that the group should be able to decide its own way

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Cultural Centrifugal Forces

C. Regionalism
Minority group identification with a particular region of a state rather than with the state as a whole.
May be expressed as a desire for self-government or even separation from the rest of the country.

D. Separatist Movements
May seek regional autonomy or complete independence based on their differences from the rest of the country.

E. Ethnic Cleansing
Tactic used to transform a multi-national area into one containing only one nation. *(Killing or forcible relocation of one traditional or ethnic group by a more powerful one.)*

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Cultural Centrifugal Forces

- ✓ **Cultural preconditions common to all separatist movements**
 - Territory to control
 - Local nationalism
- ✓ **Other common cultural characteristics of separatist movements**
 - Peripheral location
 - Social and economic inequality (real or perceived)

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Geographic Characteristics of States and Relationship to Culture

Once the cultural (people) parameters are set and create a political unit, other factors kick in.

We can see if a geographic area is in fact viable and governable as a political unit.

The physical size, shape, and location of any one state combine to distinguish it from all other states.

These characteristics affect the power and stability of states :

- ✓ economic well-being
- ✓ exposure to the rest of the world
- ✓ ability to interact with trends and “modernizations” and to be part of any diffusion.

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Geographic Characteristics of States

- **Physical Size**
 - Large states vs. small states have advantages and disadvantages. **What are some?**
 - Size alone is **not** critical in determining a country's stability and strength, but it is a contributing factor.

- **World's largest country in area is Russia**
(6.6 mil sq mi with 143 mil people)
- **Numerous mini-states, both area and population**
 - Singapore** in Asia is 269 sq mi with 5.3 million people
 - Andorra** in Europe is 181 sq mi with 85,000 people
 - Nauru** in Oceania is 8.2 sq mi with 13,000 people
 - Monaco** in Europe is 0.77 sq mi with 31,000 people
 - The Vatican** within Rome is 0.17 sq mi with 836 people

Largest in Area

Russia
Canada
USA
China
Brazil
Australia
India

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Geographic Characteristics of States

Shape

Can affect well-being of a state by fostering or hindering effective organization and affecting the interaction of its population

Most efficient shape (assuming no topographical barriers) would be a circle with the capital located in the center.

Categorization of shape:

- **Compact:** virtually equidistant from central area
- **Prorupt:** a portion extends away from the main body
- **Elongated:** stretched along one axis
- **Fragmented:** split into two or more segments
- **Perforated:** has an enclave of another state within its borders

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Distribution of National Territory

(shapes and sizes are NOT to scale)

For actual size comparisons at scale consult a world map in your textbook or an atlas.

Figure 8.2
Fundamentals of the Human World, Second Edition
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Distribution of National Territory

Enclave

A piece of territory completely surrounded by, but not part of, another country; donut hole

- San Marino; Lesotho

Pene-enclave

An intrusive piece of territory with only the smallest of outlets to international space

- The Gambia.

Exclave

A piece of national territory separated from the main body of a country by the territory of another country.

- Original Pakistan (East Pakistan now Bangladesh and West Pakistan now Pakistan)
- Kaliningrad, Russia; Alaska, USA

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Geographic Characteristics of States

Location

- **Absolute location:** where on earth is it found (lat/long); aspects of cultural ecology.
- **Relative location:** relationship to other countries; aspects of cultural interaction.
- **Landlocked:** a *disadvantage* of a state being surrounded by other states and having no independent access to international space.
- **Location on major transportation routes:** areas may benefit from access (example of relative location)
 - Economic advantages of trade.
 - Cultural advantages and liabilities; early receipt of new ideas and technologies but also hostile acts and outside influence.



Geopolitical Function of States

BUFFER STATE

An independent (but small and weak) country between two powerful countries: Nepal, Bhutan

SATELLITE STATE

A small, weak country dominated by a powerful neighbor to the extent that some of its independence is lost: Eastern European countries during the Cold War dominated by the USSR.

Both these situations put the residents at risk, may affect their national identity, foster separatist movements and create an artificial cultural/political environment.

