Political Organization of Space in Advanced Placement Human Geography

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ABSTRACT

The political geography section of the course offers the opportunity to introduce students to one of the most important ways in which humans have divided up the surface of the Earth for purposes of management and control. By challenging students to consider what lies behind the patterns on political maps, this segment of the course can encourage the development of a critical geographical perspective while enhancing student appreciation of the link between geography and current events.

Key Words: political geography, boundaries, territoriality, sovereignty, nation-state

The section of an Advanced Placement (AP) human geography class devoted to political geography can be one of the most engaging and thought-provoking parts of the course. Daily newspapers are filled with stories of geopolitical maneuverings on the part of state governmental leaders, ethno-national conflicts in every part of the world, regional integration initiatives in major world regions, and questions about political representation at home and abroad. None of these issues can be understood without reference to the political organization of space—a fundamental concern in this segment of the course.

It is important to recognize up-front that drawing connections between politics and geography is not simply a matter of providing a locational context for world affairs. Instead, the political geography section of the course should be rooted in an understanding of the ways in which political-territorial arrangements/understandings both reflect and influence geographical arrangements. In this regard the very familiarity of the world political map presents both an opportunity and a challenge. To suggest that the map is familiar might seem to be a mistake, since relatively few people know exactly where to find Paraguay or Sudan on such a map. Yet the world political map is broadly familiar in a more fundamental sense because if individuals have any geographical image of the world at all, it is likely to be of a world carved up into independent countries, with perhaps some capital cities and a few major physical features sprinkled in the midst. As a result, the world political map has a certain taken-for-granted quality that provides an easily accessible frame of reference for students, but that also makes it difficult for them to ask questions about the political organization of space that go beyond knowing where things are.

Imagine walking into a classroom, giving students a blank outline map of a continent such as Europe, and asking them to draw something on the map with which they were familiar. Students might produce all sorts of maps: ones of vegetation patterns, ones showing variable population densities, ones showing the distribution of cultural traits, or ones depicting regional differences in levels of socioeconomic well-being. But it would be the rare student who would produce any of these. Instead, the vast majority of the students who knew anything at all about the region would hand back maps showing the location of Europe’s major countries. Moreover, this outcome would hardly be surprising, given that the map of states is the one that usually hangs on the wall at homes and at school; it is the map that frames much of our discourse about the world. Indeed, for every reference to developments in the North Euro-
pean Plain, the Duoro River Basin, or the European industrial core, there are thousands to Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, and Portugal.

The conceptual impact of this state of affairs is to exempt the political map from the kinds of analytical questions we ask of most thematic maps (see Agnew 1994). When faced with a map of population densities, a student might ask (at least after completing an AP human geography course) why we see high densities in some places but not in others, or what the implications might be of the variable distribution of population for social interaction, economic development, and the like. Yet the tendency to treat political territories as static containers can lead students away from any careful consideration of how and why the units on a political map came into being in the particular spaces they occupy, how those units reflect and shape understandings about the world, and how the pattern of states relates to other patterns of significance, be they economic, social, cultural, or environmental.

An overarching goal of the political geography section of the AP human geography course, then, should be to promote at least a generalized understanding of the nature and significance of the political organization of territory in the contemporary world. In pursuit of that goal, students should gain a sense of the basic ways in which humans have divided up the planet for purposes of governance and control, as well as the implications of that division for such fundamental matters as the development of ethno-national conflicts, the emergence of regional political-economic blocs, and the struggles to develop coordinated responses to extra-national issues and problems (e.g., the accelerating loss of biodiversity). In addition, students should understand how and why the political-terrestrial norms of the modern state system are changing. Finally, they should be aware that political geographic processes play out at a variety of scales, and that what happens at one scale often influences what happens at other scales. The outline for the political geography section of the AP human geography course provides a potentially useful structure for conveying these understandings.

**Nature and Significance of Political Boundaries**

Given the importance of raising geographical questions about political-territorial arrangements, it can be useful to begin the political geography segment with a discussion of the nature and significance of boundaries. Political boundaries exist at a variety of scales and influence how goods and services are distributed, who gets represented and who does not, and how issues are confronted. Since the boundaries between independent countries receive the most attention, one might begin by considering the historical and contemporary role of these boundaries and the degree to which they reflect the geographical distribution of other phenomena. Students can be introduced to the boundaries identified in the classical political geography literature (e.g., antecedent, geometrical, superimposed), and they can be encouraged to consider the relationship of those political boundaries to social, economic, cultural, and environmental boundaries. This latter point provides a useful means of highlighting the distinct peculiarity of the global political pattern. One can see some relationships between maps of precipitation patterns and maps of population density, or between maps of population density and maps of particular types of economic activities. But the world political map looks like no other thematic map.

The unique character of the political map does not render it insignificant, of course. Instead, the map of states frames the way we understand and confront a whole host of issues, even issues with a spatial character that bears no relationship to the political pattern. Air pollution does not stop at state boundaries, but regulatory responses to air pollution problems are undertaken largely on a state-by-state basis. In many parts of the world, peoples on either side of international boundaries share socioeconomic, and even ethno-cultural, similarities, but coordinated governance across these boundaries is the exception rather than the rule. Even our basic understandings of human groupings and cultural practices are a product of the map of states. The peoples living in China are commonly termed the Chinese, even though China is comprised of a myriad of peoples including Tibetans, Mongols, Uyghurs, Kazaks, and Hui. Moreover, we refer to the dominant language in China as Chinese, even though at least five mutually unintelligible forms of spoken Chinese would likely be considered separate languages if the speakers of each had their own formally independent state.

The point of raising such matters is to encourage students to think about the ways in which political boundaries structure human affairs and understandings. In undertaking this task it is
important not just to stay at the scale of the state. Political boundaries of significance exist both "above" and "below" the state, and inviting students to consider what these are can encourage a more dynamic, nuanced understanding of the political organization of space. Looking above the state, instructors might take note of such boundaries as the former Iron Curtain, the current boundary between NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and non-NATO states, or the boundaries that have been drawn through the world's oceans to demarcate zones of control. But at the scale below the state, students can appreciate the impact of the political organization of territory on their own daily lives. In this regard, it is useful to move beyond the more commonly discussed boundaries delineating U.S. states and counties, or Canadian provinces, to consider municipalities, voting districts, special districts, and areas zoned for particular land uses.

Focusing attention on smaller-scale political-territorial units allows students to see how everything from the delivery of services to the reach of certain laws is affected by the particular configuration of political territories. Schools that students may attend (without special waivers) are determined by the spatial character of school districts. Areas subject to city land-use regulations are determined not by the area of contiguous settlement, but by the formal city limits. Even places that private citizens can use and enjoy (e.g., parks) are determined by a pattern of public space that is created through the political/legal process.

Perhaps the most evocative example of political territory at the local scale is the voting district, for it is here that the significance of political boundaries for questions of representation can be most clearly demonstrated. It is easy to show that the spatial configuration of a voting district can affect who gets represented and who does not, particularly if one brings in the concept of gerrymandering. Examples of gerrymandering, such as that shown in Figure 1, highlight the importance of thinking about territory not simply in locational terms, but as a dynamic force in human affairs. Such examples also allow instructors to highlight a core concept in political geography: human territoriality.

Sack (1981, 55) defines human territoriality as "the attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships, etc.) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a specific geographical area." This concept is fundamental to any discussion of political geographic arrangements, for these can all be traced to human territoriality as defined by Sack. For some students, the term may evoke thoughts of chirping birds or urinating mammals staking out territory, but it is important to distinguish human territoriality from animal territoriality. The former takes on many different forms depending on the cultural and temporal context, so it should not be treated as the sort of instinctual territoriality that we associate with animals. But recognizing that political spaces are the product of human territorial strategies is necessary if one is to treat political maps as something more than reference maps. It is, in fact, an essential starting point for considering the evolution of the contemporary political pattern and its changing significance in human affairs.

**EVOLUTION OF THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PATTERN**

In the context of an introductory human geography course, it is impossible to examine in depth the evolution of the modern state system. Nonetheless, students should come away from such a course with a basic understanding of the processes that led to the carving up of the planet into 200-odd "sovereign" states and to the principal territorial ideas associated with those processes. Delving into these matters requires consideration of the development of the state idea in Europe, the diffusion of that idea to much of the rest of the world through colonialism and imperialism, and the complex links that developed between political and economic globalization. Moreover, it requires examination of two concepts of extraordinary importance to the modern territorial state system: sovereignty and the idea of the nation-state.

![Figure 1. Example of gerrymandering in North Carolina's Twelfth Congressional District, 1992-1998.](image-url)
Territorial Principles of the Modern State System

A useful starting point for an examination of the territorial dynamics of the modern state system is the political situation in Europe at the dawn of the modern age (Figure 2). In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the western /central European political pattern was dominated by two distinct types of political-territorial organization (see Murphy 1996). One type was found in the west, where incipient national states such as England, France, Spain, and Portugal had been built over centuries. The leaders of these states had managed to exert an increasing level of control over their domains, and they exercised power in a fashion that was effectively free from outside influence. This is not to imply that there were no territorial conflicts with neighbors; there were. But internally, these states operated with a high degree of autonomy, and the common experiences of significant segments of their populations helped to produce a growing sense of ethno-cultural solidarity.

The other significant form of political-territorial organization existed in central and eastern Europe, where empires held sway. In terms of influence on the evolution of the state idea, the German (Holy Roman) Empire was the most significant, for this empire encompassed a wide range of territorial units that first became embroiled in the bloody wars of religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and then entered into an arrangement to keep the peace that was of enduring significance. That arrangement, set forth in the Peace of Westphalia (1648), held that the prince of any realm could determine the religion of that realm. This did not give the rulers of German states power over all affairs, but it established their power in one particularly important matter, and it did so as part of an arrangement that governed how territorial units in a system (the empire) would relate to one another. As such, it gave birth to a system based on mutual respect for the sovereignty of other units in the system.

The significance of the sovereignty principle was to provide a theoretical foundation for the carv-

Figure 2. The political pattern of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
ing up of all territory into largely autonomous governmental units. This meant that the exercise of power was no longer seen in hierarchical terms, but instead was to be exercised at a single scale—that of the state. Yet the power and legitimacy of the states making up this system were fragile as long as authority was vested in absolutist rulers and institutions. Hence, the other key ingredient to the future of the European state system was the doctrine of nationalism. Given formal expression in the French Revolution of 1789, but carried throughout Europe and beyond in the succeeding century and a half, this doctrine was based on the idea that each ethno-cultural community (i.e., nation) had the right to control its own affairs and that the exercise of power ultimately rested with the members of that community.

Behind the seeming simplicity of the doctrine of nationalism lies a host of complexities, of course, because which peoples constitute a nation—and which territories they have the right to control—are anything but uncontested notions. Indeed, it is useful for students to understand that some European nations were the product of diverse peoples being knit together in long-standing centralized states (e.g., the English, the French, and the Spanish), some were the product of nineteenth-century movements to unify diverse peoples based on some sense of cultural continuity (e.g., the Germans and the Italians), some were the product of early-twentieth-century movements to free a group from dominance by another self-defined nation (the Irish and the Norwegians), and some were the product of movements to achieve self-determination in the face of crumbling empires (e.g., many of the East European nations) (see Anderson 1986). Yet whatever the foundations of the nationalist idea, the Age of Nationalism in Europe gave rise to the notion that the territorial units making up the system of states should not only be sovereign, but should be true nation-states (i.e., states made up of a single ethno-national group).

The nation-state ideal has become a pervasive notion undergirding the modern state system, so much so that we now tend to use the terms nation and state as if they were synonymous. Yet it is important that students understand the gap between the nation-state ideal and the multicultural reality that lies behind it. No matter what approach one takes to defining an ethno-national community, there are at best a handful of good examples of true nation-states in the world today, with Iceland being perhaps the best example (see Mikesell 1983). Japan and Korea (if it were not split in two) are the only close approximations in Asia. Oceania and Africa are entirely lacking in good examples, with the possible exception of a North African case like Tunisia if it could be distinguished from its neighbors. The Americas are also devoid of good examples, again with the possible exceptions of places like Uruguay and Costa Rica if they could be distinguished from their neighbors. Hence, we are left with Europe, where the largest number of close approximations to the nation-state ideal can be found. Yet even here the closer cases have complications. Denmark encompasses German speakers in the south and a number of southwest Asian guest workers and Balkan refugees in its cities. France contains Bretons, Basques, Alsatians, and immigrants from northern Africa and southwestern Asia. Even relatively homogeneous states such as Poland and Hungary include gypsies and recent immigrants—groups that have faced considerable discrimination in a variety of countries because they do not “fit” with the dominant notion of nationhood.

The larger point, of course, is that the vast majority of the countries of the world are not nation-states in the original meaning of that term, and they can only be considered as such if we operate under the fiction that the states of the world are comprised of one, and only one, ethno-national group. Yet this is the fiction that dominates public discourse, as revealed in the use of the term nation-state to refer to all countries shown on a political map of the world and in the acceptance of the illusion that an organization called the United Nations represents the nations of the world, even though seats are not open to Kurds, Ibo, or Tibetans. At the same time, it is a fiction under extraordinary stress, as an excursion into any serious newspaper will suggest. Such papers are filled with reports of Russians fighting Chechens, Palestinians seeking their own state, Basque separatists demanding greater autonomy from Madrid, Tamils and Singhalese fighting one another in Sri Lanka, and much more. Only through an examination of the geographical realities hidden behind the nation-state ideal can we begin to understand the nature and significance of these developments.

**Colonialism and Imperialism**

An analysis of the concepts of sovereignty and the nation-state can help elucidate both the character of the modern state system and its territorial expression in Europe, but such an understanding...
says little about the character or configuration of the political pattern in other parts of the planet. To address that issue one must devote attention to the European colonial project, which began in earnest in the late fifteenth century. A useful point of entry is to show just how much of the world owes its political-territorial configuration to European colonialism. Maps in standard textbooks reveal the extraordinary spatial impact of colonialism, allowing students to appreciate the impossibility of understanding the political organization of the planet without reference to the institutions of colonialism and imperialism.

In delving into the geography of colonialism, it is important for students to understand some of the fundamental differences between types of colonialism at different times and in different places. Although many subtleties cannot be brought into an introductory course, broad distinctions can profitably be drawn between colonial dynamics in at least four cases: Latin America, South/Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the United States/Canada/Australia (see generally Meinig 1969). In the Latin American case, extensive colonial influences date back farther than in any of the other cases. A variety of European countries were involved in South America, but the principal players were the Spanish and the Portuguese. Both Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in the Americas are associated with decimation of indigenous populations, but in the Spanish case in particular, considerable intermarriage with indigenous peoples occurred. The Spanish set up an administrative system in South America that was a reflection of Spain’s own system, and the administrative units it created (e.g., viceroyalties) were constructed to facilitate administration of a vast “land empire” (Meinig’s [1969] term) as well as the extraction of goods from it. As such, the administrative units bore some relationship to the physical character of the region, but none to the indigenous ethnic pattern. And these units, in turn, became the basis for the modern pattern of states in Latin America, which emerged in the early nineteenth century at a time when Spain’s declining power coincided with the emergence of an increasingly autonomous political class in Latin America.

Colonialism in southern and southeastern Asia was quite different. In these regions, the European colonists did not have the same demographic impact on local peoples, nor were they in a position to construct major land empires in the early centuries of the colonial project. Instead, they set up key coastal bases, and they developed a highly elaborate extractive network focused on those bases. In these “sea empires” (Meinig’s [1969] term), little assimilation was sought or achieved with the locals, and the more comprehensive land-based territorial-administrative structures we associate with Latin American colonialism did not emerge until the latter part of the nineteenth century. These two structures provided the basis for the modern political pattern, but at least in the case of Southeast Asia, they were not completely disconnected from local ethno-political patterns. Instead, the European colonial bases were often focused on major river basins where groups with significant cultural continuities (Burmese, Vietnamese, etc.) already existed. Hence, the states that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, while encompassing many minorities, often had a single, large ethno-cultural majority group, particularly in Southeast Asia. Yet the ethno-cultural situation was complicated by the European colonial practice of bringing peoples from one colony to help administer another colony. This explains, for example, the large number of Indians in cities such as Rangoon and Kuala Lumpur.

The African case represents yet another model of colonialism, and one with a more recent history. European colonial ports had been established along various parts of the African coast for centuries, but it was not until the last two decades of the nineteenth century—just over 100 years ago—that the Europeans sought to divide up Africa among themselves. This occurred through an unprecedented land grab on the part of a variety of European nationalist states, which saw control over territory as essential to the fulfillment of national destinies. The effort to build what Meinig (1969) has termed “nationalist empires” was simply about getting the most land that could be gotten. The resultant territorial pattern (Figure 3) reflected the winners in this game. Importantly, the political pattern bore no relationship to indigenous ethnic patterns, or to any other pattern. The units making up the African state system were simply the product of power politics exercised from outside. The African colonies were also the last to gain independence—many as late as the 1960s. Often ruled in the interests of European industrialization and national aggrandizement, these states had little administrative/governmental infrastructure outside of that which had been imposed from the outside, with obvious consequences for the conduct of politics in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa.
The cases of the United States, Canada, and Australia belong together because these are examples of what Meinig (1969) termed "settler empires." Despite the presence of indigenous groups in these cases, the settlers regarded these colonies as effectively empty areas, and the fundamental colonial dynamic was to provide a place where migrants from the home country could make a home—while benefiting the colonial power, of course. The territorial configurations of the countries that emerged from these empires were products of both the expansion of settlement and the efforts of those who had migrated to free themselves from colonial rule. As such, their territories had a certain coherence from the perspective of the settlers, even though they ran roughshod over indigenous patterns and institutions.

Tracing the broad outlines of these four types of colonialism helps students understand some of the principal forces that led to the creation of political patterns in different parts of the world and to see the relationship between the resultant political pattern and geographies of culture, economy, and society. Yet it is also important to link an understanding of the patterns themselves to the core concepts of the modern state system. This necessitates consideration of the role of ex-colonies in the modern world, as well as the role of neo-colonial influences. During the colonial period the European powers treated their colonies as units that had not yet achieved a state of development that would allow for the emergence of true nations or that would permit them to function as sovereign units. With independence, however, these units entered a world political system based, at least theoretically, on the concepts of sovereignty and the nation-state. These states found themselves caught between two worlds. The economic dependencies that had developed during the colonial period were difficult to shed because these states had come to occupy particular subordinate niches in the emerging global economy. As such, their sovereignty was often as much a fiction as a reality. At the same time, the legitimacy of state leaders was tied to their ability to exert power in the name of "nations"—in the process creating another type of fiction.

The discussion of such issues provides a good opportunity to link the political geography segment of the course to the segment focused on global economic patterns, for understanding the geographical dynamics of the global economy provides important insights into political territoriality in the contemporary world. At the same time, economics is not the only issue. The governing elite in many former colonies can trace its roots to colonial social structures, and many of the colonial powers remain actively involved with their former colonial possessions, either through formal associations of ex-colonies (e.g., the British Commonwealth) or through more informal mechanisms of influence and control. At the same time, large-scale geopolitical maneuverings—most obviously during the Cold War—led powerful states to play off so-called Third World states against one another, as well as to support internal developments that fit a geopolitical game plan, irrespective of the consequences at the local level. The importance of bringing out these points, of course, is to promote an awareness of the complicated economic and political inequalities that lie behind the veneer of theoretical equality between states.

**Internal Political Boundaries and Arrangements**

Although an introductory course is likely to focus primarily on the international arena, it is important that students have a sense of the princi-

![Figure 3. European colonies in Africa.](image-url)
pal ways in which political space is organized internally, as well as the ways in which geographical influences can affect internal political integration initiatives. A good starting point can be to highlight the different approaches to territorial governance at play in federal and unitary systems. This, in turn, can promote consideration of hierarchies of political-territorial organization, from municipalities and special districts to counties, states, and provinces, to the state itself. In each case it is important to go beyond the simple presence of political territories to consider the ways the political organization of space influences what and who gets attention. It is also important to point to territorial arrangements that may not fit within the usual hierarchy of political-territorial governance, such as Indian reservations in the United States. Such territorial structures reflect the tension between the dominant political pattern and influences that can be antithetical to it.

The topic of internal political boundaries is also a good place to consider a particular type of political map students are likely to have encountered: electoral maps. Electoral maps are widely used not just to show who has won and lost elections, but patterns of support for different candidates and issues (Archer and Shelley 1986). Such maps can be valuable teaching tools, as they allow students to consider relationships among patterns. Students might be asked, for example, to construct an electoral map at the state or national level, and to then consider what that map reflects about social, economic, or cultural circumstances. Such an exercise can permit discussion of broad-scale influences on political outlook, while also promoting consideration of the problems of drawing generalizations at large scales.

As a complement to the discussion of formal political-territorial arrangements, students should also consider geographical influences on internal political integration. Efforts to address this topic have traditionally focused on the impacts of the territorial shape and geographical situation of countries. Such matters are sometimes relevant; there are, for example, special integration challenges associated with particular territorial configurations (e.g., elongated, fragmented, or prompted forms) or locations (e.g., a landlocked situation). However, it is critical that students understand that territorial shape and situation are but one of many influences, and that they need to be seen in context. Some landlocked states (e.g., Switzerland) are comparatively well off and stable, as are some elongated states (e.g., Norway). At the same time, compactness and a comparatively advantageous situation do not translate into stability and power for a country such as Sri Lanka.

To get at the most significant influences on political integration, it is necessary to consider such matters as the presence of sub-national ethnic minorities in states dominated by a majority group with an exclusionary ethno-nationalist agenda, the presence of dramatic interregional socioeconomic polarities within states, the extent to which states have enough autonomy within global geopolitical and geoeconomic structures to prioritize internal matters, the degree to which the legitimacy of governmental leaders is tied to successful internal integration initiatives, and the capacity of states to develop and sustain well-articulated transportation and communication networks. Highlighting matters such as these allows students to understand the relationship between geography and politics, while promoting a sense of the relevance of geographical study for understanding critical problems in the modern world.

**CHALLENGES TO INHERITED POLITICAL-TERRITORIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Despite the continuing significance of the map of states in human affairs, growing challenges to the nature and significance of that map should be brought into the political geography segment of an AP human geography course. Most obviously, the concept of sovereignty itself is being questioned as developments at a variety of different scales are undermining the state-territorial system. Many of these developments are economic in nature, and they range from the expanding scope of multinational corporate activity to the inability of some states to exert much control over the domestic economy in the face of international debt payments and the need to sustain the production of key cash crops for external consumption. In these cases, consideration of this topic ties in closely with the globalization issues that are raised in the economic segment of the course.

Challenges to the inherited political-territorial order do not simply come in spatially ambiguous economic forms, however. There are concrete examples of fragmentation, unification, and alliance that are altering the political geographic order. Most obviously, the growth of increasingly powerful regional political-economic blocs undermines the notion that the map of states is the only map we need to know to understand the international order.
It is useful to introduce students to some of the most important of these blocs, including the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the European Union (formerly European Community). The latter's particular importance derives from the fact that it has gone much farther than any other supranational regional organization in superseding the traditional sovereign powers of its member states. It is an organization to which a vast majority of western and west-central European countries belong, and to which many other countries to the east wish to belong (see Figure 4). Beginning with the elimination of trade barriers and moving on to an expansion of powers in the social and political arenas and to the adoption of a common currency, the European Union (EU) has become an increasingly significant force in European affairs. Indeed, the EU represents a novel form of political space in the international arena, with potentially far-reaching consequences for the global political order.

In discussing the nature and meaning of the European political-territorial experiment, it is important to point out that it is not uncontested. There is considerable concern in Europe today over the concentration of powers in what some see as a relatively unresponsive central bureaucracy, and not all member states have even agreed to join the common currency area. Moreover, it is important to note that the political-territorial significance of the EU is not just felt at the supranational scale. The EU has facilitated the development of cross-border cooperation regions that are reshaping the spatial parameters of Europe's political and social order (e.g., along the upper Rhine between France and Germany). More broadly, discussing the impetus behind European integration and the geographical circumstances that facilitated that impetus (e.g., economic complementarities, commonalities of political and economic systems, an infrastructure and settlement pattern facilitating integration) allows students to understand the context of the European integration initiative and to compare and contrast it with regional integration initiatives in other parts of the world.

Since regional political-economic blocs coexist with other political-territorial entities and regimes of international significance, students should be made aware of alternative forms of suprastate political-territorial integration. In introducing such alternative forms, it is useful to familiarize students with some of the classic geopolitical doctrines discussed in the major texts (e.g., Mackinder's heartland theory), for these are suggestive of the imperatives that drive suprastate integration. Students can then be introduced to contemporary alliances that bring states together largely for geopolitical ends (e.g., NATO), as well as to regional geoeconomic integration initiatives that are facilitating the interlinking of the economies of different states (e.g., the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). In addition, students can be made aware of the role of global organizations such as the United Nations in setting up regimes for peace keeping, human rights monitoring, and management of the world's oceans. Since the latter issue has both clear spatial dimensions and far-reaching significance for the ways that humans use a significant portion of the Earth's surface, students should become familiar with the ways in which the international law of the seas treats coastal waters, Exclusive Economic Zones, and the high seas, as well as the presence of (and reasons for) jurisdictional conflicts in such high-profile cases as the South China Sea.

In considering challenges to the inherited political-territorial order it is important to look below the state, as well as above the state, for the rise of substate nationalist movements in many parts of the world represents an increasingly significant dynam-
nationalism in Canada, just as the emergence of a political Organization of Space
promotes consideration of the status of the nation-ic in world affairs. Sketching some of the better
known cases of intrastate ethno-nationalist conflict
promotes consideration of the role of internal political-territorial arrangements
in ethno-national struggles. The fact that French
Canadians are concentrated in a single province has
obvious implications for the development of ethno-
nationalism in Canada, just as the emergence of a
set of territories under the jurisdiction of the Palest-
inian Authority has profound implications for the
political-territorial map of the Middle East. One
might note that substate regionalism is not a phe-
nomenon that is limited to self-conscious ethno-
national minorities. Regionalist movements without
a distinct ethnic character have developed in such
diverse settings as southern Spain, eastern Russia,
and northwestern Argentina, suggesting that peo-
ples in a variety of settings are no longer content to
define their interests solely in terms of the state in
which they are situated.

Ultimately, the variety of developments dis-
cussed above highlight a variety of disjunctions that
exist between formal political patterns on the one
hand and more complicated patterns of ethnicity,
economy, and environment on the other. One of the
ultimate goals of this segment of the course should
be to promote student awareness of this disjunction
and to invite consideration of its significance. I have
already given a number of examples of this phe-
nomenon in the ethnic and economic arenas. The
environmental arena, however, should not be over-
looked. It is well understood that environmental
issues and problems do not stop at state bound-
daries, and that the division of the world into indi-
vidual states impedes efforts to confront such prob-
lems. The variable success of states in dealing with
such diverse issues as the depletion of the ozone
layer, loss of biodiversity, and global warming pro-
vides important insights into the territorial dynam-
ics of the state system and its limitations as a deci-
sion-making framework. Effective action largely
occurs where the economic stakes are not high (e.g.,
regulation of chlorofluorocarbons), but in other
areas, state interests continue to drive the regula-
try process (e.g., strategy for dealing with carbon
emissions under the Kyoto protocol).

The significance of bringing environmental
issues into the political geography segment of the
course is not just to highlight the fate of different
international environmental initiatives. A point to
stress is that some of the greatest pressures to over-
come the rigidities of the modern territorial state
system are found in the environmental arena. The
explosion of interest and concern over environmen-
tal matters has led to growing pressure on state
structures and leaders to adopt progressive envi-
rmental postures, even at the expense of tradi-
tional sovereign arrangements. Such pressures are
facilitated by the emergence of new coalitions
across international boundaries that are bypassing
state structures in their efforts to promote environ-
mentally sustainable practices and institutions.
Although their success is spotty at best, it is increas-
ingly difficult for a tropical country to make a deci-
sion about rainforest harvesting, a European coun-
try to make a decision about nuclear power devel-
opment, or a Southeast Asian country to make a
decision about dam construction without significant
concern for the reaction of the international com-
munity or subgroups thereof. When one considers
that these same concerns are sometimes—though
certainly not always—a factor in domestic decision
making on everything from weapons development
to the treatment of minority populations, it becomes
clear that we are no longer living in a world in
which most fundamental human realities can be
understood or addressed within the territorial
framework of the modern state system.

As important as this last point might be, it is
equally important that students understand that
developments undermining the traditional work-
ings of sovereignty have by no means rendered the
modern territorial state obsolete. Much can be said
in support of this, but a particularly powerful way
of conveying its significance is to point out the con-
tinued existence of major interstate territorial con-
flicts in the contemporary world. There are dozens
of active territorial disputes between states:
Ecuador versus Peru, Venezuela versus Guyana,
Turkey versus Greece, Ethiopia versus Eritrea, Pak-
istan versus India, China versus India, Kazakhstan
versus Uzbekistan, to name just a few that have
flared up in recent years. If control over territory
had lost its political/geopolitical significance in the
modern world, such conflicts would not be an
important dynamic in international relations. The
point is that challenges are growing to the domi-
nant political-territorial framework of the modern
era, but that the modern state system continues to
be the frame of reference against which opposition
movements are set, be they ethnic, social, economic,
geopolitical, or environmental.
CONCLUSION

Political geography is an inherently fascinating subject, with important implications for understanding the world in which we live. To exploit that potential it is vitally important that students come to think about the political organization of territory as a dynamic force in human affairs, not just a backdrop to events and processes. Pursing this end requires consideration of the changing character of salient political-territorial structures and the ways they both reflect and influence ideas about territory/space, geographical arrangements, and the changing character of peoples and places. Why did particular territories develop in the spaces where they developed? What ideas do these territories reflect about legitimate approaches to territorial governance? How does their existence affect the ways in which people think about themselves and about each other? How do particular territorial spaces influence which problems get addressed, and how to address them? Questions such as these are at the heart of a political geographic perspective on the world, and an introductory AP human geography class should set students on a trajectory that will promote understanding of the significance of these questions, while providing the type of background that will allow students to begin answering them. In the process, students will not only prepare themselves for more advanced coursework in geography, they will broaden and deepen their understanding of the world in which they live.

REFERENCES
Appendix A. Internet and print resources for political geography.

GENERAL PRINT RESOURCES


Gurr, T. 1996. Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace. This work identifies ethnic and religious minorities, details their connections and differences, sets them into a theoretical framework, and provides several regional in-depth case studies.


GENERAL WEB RESOURCES

CIA Factbook – <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> Extensive country profiles with the following data categories: geography, people, government, economy, communications, transportation, military and transnational issues. Includes a limited map section.

Crisis Web – <http://www.crisisweb.org/> Home page of the International Crisis Group, a private, multinational organization. Features reports and briefings on a small number of on-going conflicts.


INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES RESEARCH UNIT (IBRU) at the University of Durham – <http://www-ibru.dur.ac.uk/> Features an International Boundaries Database and information on IBRU periodicals, conferences and workshops. Also has a good list of boundary-related links.

INCORE (Initiative on conflict resolution and ethnicity) – <http://www.incore.ULSEEE.AU.K/> A joint initiative of the United Nations University and the University of Ulster. The Conflict Data Service is excellent and features annotated guides to internet sources on conflict and ethnicity, peace agreements, and thematic issues. Also includes a researcher database.

MINORITIES AT RISK PROJECT – <http://www.BSOS.UMD.EDU/cidcm/mar/> A project of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at the University of Maryland. “Minorities at Risk is an independent, university-based research project that monitors and analyzes the status and conflicts of politically-active communal groups in countries with a population of at least 500,000.” Includes detailed overviews and chronologies of minority ethnic groups.

PERRY-CASTANEDA LIBRARY MAP COLLECTION – University of Texas – <http://http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html> One of the most comprehensive on-line map libraries.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY SPECIALTY GROUP – <http://garnet.acns.fsu.edu/~dpurcell/pgsgl.html> Official page of the AAG Political Geography Specialty Group. Primarily includes links to conferences and a limited number of publications and resources.

POLITICAL RESOURCES ON THE NET – <http://www.agora.stm.it/politic/> “Listings of political sites available on the Internet sorted by country, with links to Parties, Organizations, Governments, Media and more from all around the world.”

RELIEF WEB – <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf> A project of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Articles, reports and other information on worldwide humanitarian relief efforts. Includes a map section.

UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY – <http://www.usia.gov/> Official site of USIA.

UNITED STATES STATE DEPARTMENT – <http://www.state.gov/> Official site of U.S. State Department

REGIONAL WEB RESOURCES

AFRICA NEWS ONLINE – <http://www.africanews.org/> Extensive and up-to-date news on Africa.


INDEX ON AFRICA – <http://www.africaindex.africainfo.no/> “A comprehensive guide to the continent.”