Political Geography

• Study of the organization and distribution of political phenomena, e.g.:
  • organization of power
  • rule of authority
  • territoriality of citizenship
Political Geography

Key Questions

• How is power exerted over different places and at different geographical scales?
• How do different political arrangements and forms of the “state” affect populations?
• How is power exercised through of political borders and citizenship?
• How do geopolitics change through time?
Political Rule over Land

- **Sovereignty**: Independent authority over a territory; the power to rule and create laws
- **State**: The set of political institutions that govern a territory and maintain a monopoly over the legitimate use of force.
- **Sovereign State**: Territory containing a permanent population, sovereign government, and independence from other states and powers.
- **Country**: Territory of a sovereign state
- **Government**: Particular group of people, forming an administrative bureaucracy, that controls the state apparatus at any given time
- Community of people with a common history, language, culture, ancestry, and/or territory
- Sovereignty can be absent or disputed
- Stateless nations
Nation-State

- **Nation-state**: State whose territory coincides with that occupied by a particular nation
- Majority of the population from a single ethnic group
- Language, education, infrastructure, and economic systems organized by central government
Other National Political Systems

- Binational or multinational state: More than one nation within a sovereign state
  - Nigeria, Russia, UK, etc.
- Stateless nation: People without a state
Physical Shape of Countries

- Compact
- Prorupt
- Elongated
- Fragmented
- Perforated
- Enclave
Locations of Countries

- Absolute location
- Relative location
- Landlocked
- Geographic disadvantage
- On major trade routes
- Economic advantages
- Diffusion of new ideas and technologies
Cores and Capitals

- Core area: Nucleus and main center of industry, commerce, population, political, and intellectual life

- Capital is usually in the core and frequently the primate city (unitary state)

- Federal states: regional governments that have limited autonomy under a central government; administrative capital city is often relocated outside of core cities

  - U.S.A., Canada

- Forward-thrust capitals: deliberately sited to promote commerce and population growth outside of core cities (Brasilia)
Boundaries

• Natural (physical) boundaries
  • Mountains, rivers, lakes, etc.

• Artificial (geometric) boundaries
  • Sections of parallels or meridians

• Antecedent boundaries
  • Established before the area is well populated

• Subsequent boundaries
  • Established after the area has been settled
Natural (Physical) Boundaries

- Depend on some physical characteristics of the landscape
- e.g., France and Spain separated by Pyrenees Mountains
Artificial Boundaries

• Depend on socially developed systems of demarcation like parallels or meridians

• e.g., DPRK (North Korea) and ROK (South Korea) along 38th Parallel
Antecedent Boundaries

• Boundaries that are established before an area is heavily populated by groups recognized by the State.

• e.g., Western part of U.S.A. and Canadian border (ignoring presence of non-white peoples...
Subsequent Boundaries

• Borders established after populations are established in an area, often along ethnic/national territorial claims

• e.g., break-up of Yugoslavia
Subsequent Boundaries

- Consequent (ethnographic) boundaries
  - Drawn to accommodate existing national territories (Yugoslavia)
- Superimposed boundaries
  - Ignore existing ethnic national territories (Western Africa)
Boundaries as Sources of Conflict

• Landlocked states
• Use of facilities at a foreign port
• Access through a corridor to the sea or navigable river
Boundaries as Sources of Conflict

- Waterbodies as boundaries
- Where the boundary line should lie
- Use of water resources
Boundaries as Sources of Conflict

- Minority group identification
- Irredentism
- Advocating a state to annex territory claimed by another state, but which is inhabited by people who have common ethnicity or historical claims to the land.
- Location of ethnic homeland spans border
- Internal separatist movements
Boundaries as Sources of Conflict

• Resource disputes
  • Movement of peoples across border
  • Natural resource reserves in border regions (Iraq-Kuwait)
  • Physical or cultural resource on adjacent land in neighboring state (Jerusalem)
Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait
Promoting State Cohesion

- Nationalism
  - Identification with the state and acceptance of national goals
  - Strengthens the political system
  - Helps integrate different groups into a unified population
  - Unites geographically dispersed populations
Promoting State Cohesion

- Symbols are used to promote nationalism
- Unifying Institutions
- Schools, armed forces, media
- Organization and administration
- Transportation and communication
States and Religion

• Religious institutions may compete with national institutions for allegiance
• Religious institutions may serve a primary role in governance over a state
• Conflict between majority and minority religious groups
• Sectarian conflict between different denominations
Challenges to the State

- Imperialism, colonialism, anti-colonialism
- Globalization of economies and governance
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Migration, citizenship, nationalism
- Increase in nationalist and separatist movements
- Legitimacy of rule
Challenges to State Authority

- Subnationalism: Feeling that one owes primary allegiance to a traditional group or nation rather than to the state
- Self-determination
- Regionalism: Minority group identification with a particular region of a state rather than with the state as a whole
Challenges to State Authority

- Separatist movements

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Challenges to State Authority

• Ethnic cleansing: Killing or forcible relocation of one traditional or ethnic group by a more powerful one

• Preconditions of separatist movements: Territory and nationality

• Common characteristics of separatist movements: Peripheral location and social and economic inequality
Cooperation Among States

• Supranationalism: Associations of states created for mutual benefit and to achieve shared objectives

• United Nations (UN)

• Provides a forum where countries can discuss international problems and regional concerns and a mechanism for forestalling disputes or ending wars

• Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Bank, International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO)
Cooperation Among States

- Economic Governance
- World Trade Organization (WTO)
- International Monetary Fund, World Bank
- Military and Political Governance
- Geneva Convention
- Bandung Conference
- Environmental Governance
- Regional Governance
Local and Regional Political Organization

- Local and regional governmental organization represent spatial systems of political decision making
- The geography of representation
  - Urban/rural divisions
  - Politics of difference
  - Redistricting/reapportionment
Quiz

• Explain what is meant by environmental determinism and possibilism and how they differ.

• What is the difference between a nation, a sovereign state, and a nation-state?

• Do you think regions of a country ought to be able to secede? If decided by a popular vote, do you think that majority approval should be required throughout the entire country or only in the areas seeking to secede?