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Political geography definition

Keep up with the latest daily buzz with the BuzzFeed Daily newsletter! Human geography is the branch of geography concerned with understanding the world's culture and how it relates to geographic space. Political geography is the further offshoot that studies the spatial distribution of political processes and how these processes are impacted by one's geographic location. It often studies local and national elections, international relationships and the political structure of different areas based on geography. The development of political geography began with the growth of human geography as a separate geographic discipline from physical geography. Early human geographers often studied a nation or specific location's political development based on physical landscape attributes. In many areas, the landscape was thought to either help or hinder the economic and political success and therefore the development of nations. One of the earliest geographers to study this relationship was Friedrich Ratzel. In his 1897 book Politische Geographie, Ratzel examined the idea that nations grew politically and geographically when their cultures also expanded and that nations needed to continue to grow so that their cultures would have sufficient room to develop. Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory was another early theory in political geography. In 1904, Mackinder, a British geographer, developed this theory in his article, "The Geographical Pivot of History." Mackinder said the world would be divided into a Heartland consisting of Eastern Europe, a World Island made up of Eurasia and Africa, Peripheral Islands, and the New World. His theory said that the age of seapower was ending and that whoever controlled the heartland would control the world. Both Ratzel and Mackinder's theories remained important before and during World War II. The Heartland Theory, for instance, influenced the creation of buffer states between the Soviet Union and Germany at the end of the war. By the time of the Cold War, their theories and the importance of political geography began to decline and other fields within human geography began to develop. In the late 1970s however, political geography again began to grow. Today, political geography is considered one of the most important branches of human geography and many geographers study a variety of fields concerned with political processes and geography. Some of the fields within today's political geography include, but are not limited to: The mapping and study of elections and their results The relationship between the government at the federal, state and local level and its people The marking of political boundaries The relationships between nations involved in international supranational political groupings such as the European Union Modern political trends also have an impact on political geography, and in recent years sub-topics focused on these trends have developed within political geography. This is known as critical political geography and includes political geography focused on ideas related to feminist groups and gay and lesbian issues as well as youth communities. Some of the most famous geographers to study political geography were John A. Agnew, Richard Hartshorne, Halford Mackinder, Friedrich Ratzel and Ellen Churchill Semple. Today, political geography is also a specialty group within the Association of American Geographers and there is an academic journal called Political Geography. Some titles from articles in this journal include "Redistricting and the Elusive Ideals of Representation," "Climate Triggers: Rainfall Anomalies, Vulnerability and Communal Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa," and "Normative Goals and Demographic Realities." Discover the ways in which physical boundaries and divisions impact the development of countries and states, international organizations, diplomacy, internal divisions, voting, and so much more. The control and ownership of the oceans have long been a controversial topic. Since ancient empires began to sail and trade over the seas, command of coastal areas has been important to governments. However, it wasn't until the twentieth century that countries began to come together to discuss the standardization of maritime boundaries. Surprisingly, the situation still has yet to be resolved. From ancient times through the 1950s, countries established the limits of their jurisdiction at sea on their own. While most countries established a distance of three nautical miles, the borders varied between three and 12 nm. These territorial waters are considered part of a country's jurisdiction, subject to all of the laws of the land of that country. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the world began to realize the value of mineral and oil resources under the oceans. Individual countries began to expand their claims to the ocean for economic development. In 1945, U.S. President Harry Truman claimed the entire continental shelf off the coast of the U.S. (which extends almost 200 nm off the Atlantic coast). In 1952, Chile, Peru, and Ecuador claimed a zone 200 nm from their shores. The international community realized that something needed to be done to standardize these borders. The first United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS I) met in 1958 to begin discussions on these and other oceanic issues. In 1960 UNCLOS II was held and in 1973 UNCLOS III took place. Following UNCLOS III, a treaty was developed that attempted to tackle the boundary issue. It specified that all coastal countries would have a 12 nm territorial sea and a 200 nm Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Each country would control the economic exploitation and environmental quality of its EEZ. Though the treaty has yet to be ratified, most countries are adhering to its guidelines and have begun to consider themselves ruler over a 200 nm domain. Martin Glassner reports that these territorial seas and EEZs occupy approximately one-third of the world ocean, leaving just two-thirds as "high-seas" and international waters. When two countries lie closer than 400 nm apart (200nm EEZ + 200nm EEZ), an EEZ boundary must be drawn between the countries. Countries closer than 24 nm apart draw a median line boundary between each other's territorial waters. The UNCLOS protects the right of passage and even flight through (and over) narrow waterways known as chokepoints. Countries like France, which continues to control many small Pacific islands, now have millions of square miles in a potentially profitable ocean area under their control. One controversy over the EEZs has been to determine what constitutes enough of an island to have its own EEZ. The UNCLOS definition is that an island must remain above the water line during high water and may not just be rocks, and must also be habitable for humans. There's still much to be hammered out regarding the political geography of the oceans but it seems that countries are following the recommendations of the 1982 treaty, which should limit most arguments over control of the sea. Canada is the world's second-largest country by area but its population, at slightly less than that of the state of California, is small by comparison. Canada's largest cities are Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, and Calgary. Even with its small population, Canada plays a large role in the world's economy and is one of the largest trading partners of the United States. Capital: Ottawa Population: 35,881,659 (2018) Official Languages: English, French Currency: Canadian dollar (CAD) Form of Government: Federal parliamentary democracy Climate: Varies from temperate in south to subarctic and arctic in north Total Area: 3,855,085 square miles (9,984,670 square kilometers) Highest Point: Mount Logan at 19,550 feet (5,959 meters) Lowest Point: Atlantic Ocean at 0 feet (0 meters) The first people to live in Canada were the Inuit and First Nation Peoples. The first Europeans to reach the country were likely the Vikings and it is believed that Norse explorer Leif Eriksson led them to the coast of Labrador or Nova Scotia in 1000 CE. European settlement did not begin in Canada until the 1500s. In 1534, French explorer Jacques Cartier discovered the St. Lawrence River while searching for fur and shortly thereafter, he claimed Canada for France. The French began to settle there in 1541 but an official settlement was not established until 1604. That settlement, called Fort Royal, was located in what is now Nova Scotia. In addition to the French, the English also began exploring Canada for its fur and fish trade and in 1670 established the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1713, a conflict developed between the English and French and the English won control of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Hudson Bay. The Seven Year's War, in which England sought to gain more control of the country, then began in 1756. That war ended in 1763 and England was given full control of Canada with the Treaty of Paris. In the years after the Treaty of Paris, English colonists flocked to Canada from England and the United States. In 1849, Canada was given the right to self-government and the country of Canada was officially established in 1867. It was comprised of Upper Canada (the area that became Ontario), Lower Canada (the area that became Quebec), Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. In 1869, Canada continued to grow when it bought land from the Hudson's Bay Company. This land was later divided into different provinces, one of which was Manitoba. It joined Canada in 1870 followed by British Columbia in 1871 and Prince Edward Island in 1873. The country then grew again in 1901 when Alberta and Saskatchewan joined Canada. It remained this size until 1949 when Newfoundland became the 10th province. Because of the long history of conflict between the English and French in Canada, a division between the two still exists in the country's languages today. In Quebec the official language at the provincial level is French and there have been several Francophone initiatives to ensure that the language remains prominent there. In addition, there have been numerous initiatives for secession. The most recent was in 1995 but it failed by a vote of 50.6% to 49.4%. There are also some French-speaking communities in other portions of Canada, mostly on the east coast, but the majority of the rest of the country speaks English. At the federal level, however, the country is officially bilingual. Canada is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy and federation. It has three branches of government. The first is the executive, which consists of the head of state, who is represented by a governor general, and the prime minister, who is considered the head of government. The second branch is the legislative, a bicameral parliament consisting of the Senate and House of Commons. The third branch is made up of the Supreme Court. Canada's industry and land use vary based on region. The eastern portion of the country is the most industrialized but Vancouver, British Columbia, a major seaport, and Calgary, Alberta, are some western cities that are highly industrialized as well. Alberta also produces 75% of Canada's oil and is important for coal and natural gas. Canada's resources include nickel (mainly from Ontario), zinc, potash, uranium, sulfur, asbestos, aluminum, and copper. Hydroelectric power and pulp and paper industries are also important. In addition, agriculture and ranching play a significant role in the Prairie Provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) and several parts of the rest of the country. Much of Canada's topography consists of gently rolling hills with rock outcrops because the Canadian Shield, an ancient region with some of the world's oldest known rocks, covers almost half of the country. The southern portions of the Shield are covered with boreal forests while the northern parts are tundra because it is too far north for trees. To the west of the Canadian Shield are the central plains, or prairies. The southern plains are mostly grass and the north is forested. This area is also dotted with hundreds of lakes because of depressions in the land caused by the last glaciation. Farther west is the rugged Canadian Cordillera, stretching from the Yukon Territory into British Columbia and Alberta. Canada's climate varies with location but the country is classified as being temperate in the south and arctic in the north. Winters, however, are normally long and harsh in most of the country. Nearly 90% of Canadians live within 99 miles of the U.S. border (because of harsh weather and the expense of building on permafrost in the north). The Trans-Canada Highway is the longest national highway in the world at 4,725 miles (7,604 km). The United States is the only country that borders Canada. The majority of Canada's southern border runs straight along the 49th parallel (49 degrees north latitude), while the border along and east of the Great Lakes is jagged. 13 U.S. states share a border with Canada: Alaska Idaho Maine Michigan Minnesota Montana New Hampshire New York North Dakota Ohio Pennsylvania Vermont Washington In geography, a location's relief is the difference between its highest and lowest elevations. For example, with both mountains and valleys in the area, the local relief of Yosemite National Park is impressive. A two-dimensional relief map displays the topography of a given area. Physical relief maps actually have raised areas that represent different elevations. (You may have seen them in school.) However, if you're going for a hike, they're not very practical to carry in your pocket. Flat maps represent relief in a variety of ways. On older flat maps, you may see areas with lines of various thickness to represent variations in the steepness of locations. With this technique, known as "hachuring," the thicker the lines, the steeper the area. As mapmaking evolved, hachuring was replaced by shaded areas that represented variations in the steepness of the land. These types of maps may also show altitude notations at various locations on the map to give viewers some context. Differences in elevation on flat maps can also also be represented using different colors—usually lighter to darker for ascending elevations, with the darkest areas being the farthest above sea level. The drawback with this method is that contours in the land don't show up. Topographic maps, which also are types of flat maps, use contour lines to represent elevation. These lines connect points that are at the same level, so you know that when you travel from one line to another, you are either going up or down in elevation. The lines also have numbers on them, specifying which elevation is represented by the points connected by that line. The lines maintain a consistent interval between them—such as 100 feet or 50 meters—which will be noted in the map's legend. As the lines get closer together, the land becomes steeper. If the numbers become lower as you move toward the center of an area, they represent the site of a depression and have hash marks on them to distinguish them from hills. You'll find topographic maps in sporting goods stores or online sites that cater to outdoor enthusiasts. Since topographic maps also display water depths, locations of rapids, waterfalls, dams, boat ramp access points, intermittent streams, wooded marshes and swamps, sand vs. gravel beaches, sandbars, seawalls, breakwaters, dangerous rocks, levees, and mangroves, they are extremely useful to campers, hikers, hunters, and anyone going fishing, rafting, or boating. Topographic maps also show aboveground and buried pipelines, as well as utility and telephone poles, caves, covered reservoirs, cemeteries, mine shafts, open-pit mines, campgrounds, ranger stations, winter recreation areas, and dirt roads that likely won't appear on your basic roadmap. While topography refers to land, a chart that shows the varying depths of water is called a bathymetric chart or map. In addition to showing depths with lines as on a topographic map, these types of charts may also show differences in depths via color-coding. Surfers might review bathymetric charts of beaches in order to locate places where waves are likely to break bigger than in other areas (a steep ascent in proximity to a beach means larger waves).

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