

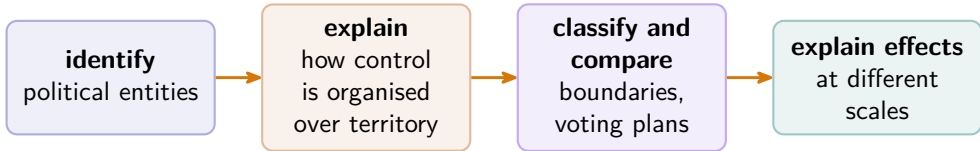
Political Patterns and Processes

AP Human Geography ■ Unit 4

AP Human Geography



Political patterns and processes



Use evidence about **boundary history**, **constitutional powers** and the **groups affected**.

1

Introduction to Political Geography

States and nations

Entity	Meaning
state 国家	Territory, permanent population, government and sovereignty 主权: authority to govern independently of another state.
nation 民族	A community identifying as a people, often linked to shared history, culture or language.
nation-state 民族国家	A close match between a nation's territory and a state's borders. An approximation, not proof of cultural uniformity.

Political geography 政治地理学 examines the organisation and control of space.

Overlapping political entities

Entity	Distinction
multinational state 多民族国家	One state includes multiple national communities.
stateless nation 无国家民族	A nation lacks its own independent state; its members may still have citizenship elsewhere.
Multistate nation	One national community extends across several states; can overlap with stateless nationhood.
Autonomous region	Exercises specified self-government within a larger state; autonomy does not itself mean independence.

Examples and the limits of labels

Canada: a federal state

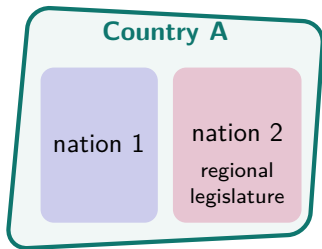
2006: Parliament recognised the Québécois as a **nation within Canada**

Kurds: commonly taught as a **stateless nation** across several states

Japan: an **approximate** nation-state example

- A nation **need not be** a separate country
- “Stateless nation” differs from claiming every Kurdish person lacks citizenship
- Japan’s indigenous **Ainu** show why the label must not imply everyone shares one identity

Political entities: attempt



Original fictional Country A

One **independent government** controls the territory. Two communities identify as different **nations**. One elects a **regional legislature** but has no independent foreign policy.

Your turn

Identify the state, national communities and regional unit. Does this establish **two independent states**?

Political entities: worked check

Evidence	Interpretation
Independent government	Country A is the state; it can also be multinational.
Two national identities	The communities are nations; identity does not itself create another sovereign state.
Regional legislature	Some autonomy below the state level; determine its powers from the constitutional arrangement.
No independent foreign policy	Consistent with a subnational unit. Do not substitute the presence of a legislature for sovereign statehood.

International cooperation and sovereignty



UN General Assembly hall

Member states cooperate while retaining separate governments.

A photograph of an assembly cannot establish the legal powers of every organisation or whether each decision binds members.

Read the relevant treaty and decision-making rules.

Independent state: exam definition

2025 AP Human Geography, Set 1, Q1(A)

Define an **independent state**.

Possible response “A political entity with an **independent government** that governs its **own territory**.”

- The official scheme accepts **several formulations**
- No universal three-part checklist; an example is not required in every definition

Follow the **actual command** and question.

2

Political Power and Territoriality

Territoriality and self-determination

Territoriality 领域性 connections between people, culture, economic activity and land, and attempts to **influence or control** an area.

Self-determination a people's **political status**; it does not automatically turn every national community into an independent state.

who exercises
authority?

over **which**
territory?

by what
institutions?

with what
limits?

Control can affect movement, access to resources and livelihoods.

Colonial power and political change

Process	Political geography
Colonialism	External control of territory and people, sometimes with settlement.
Imperialism	Wider extension of power over other societies.
Independence movements	Can change governments and international boundaries through different political processes.
Economic influence	Continuing unequal influence after formal independence. Trade alone does not establish external control.

This continuing unequal influence is termed **neocolonialism** 新殖民主义.

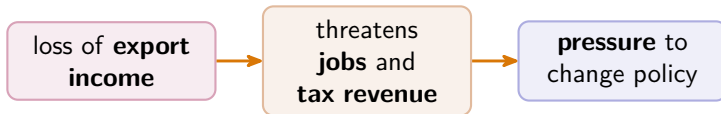
Economic influence: attempt



Original scenario

- 1 Explain how policy choices could be **constrained** without direct foreign government.
- 2 What evidence distinguishes **unequal control** from **ordinary trade**?

Economic influence: worked reasoning



- A mechanism of **influence without formal annexation**
- Investigate dependence, alternatives, bargaining power and the actual policy response before calling it **neocolonial**

A foreign buyer's existence establishes **trade**; it does not prove control over the state.

Choke points and shatterbelts

Concept	Mechanism and limit
Choke points 咽喉要道	Narrow strategic routes, such as Suez or Malacca. Disruption can increase shipping time and costs; legal navigation rights still matter.
shatterbelts 破碎地带	Internal divisions interact with competition between external powers. Explain the actors and support networks rather than predicting conflict from diversity alone.

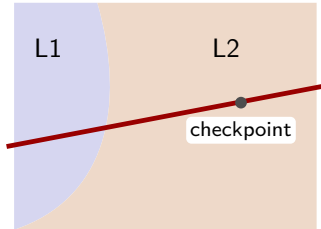
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Political Boundaries

Boundary history and geometry

Type	Evidence needed
Antecedent 先成边界	Predates later intensive settlement or cultural landscape development; not evidence that Indigenous inhabitants were absent.
subsequent 后成边界	Develops after settlement and cultural landscapes.
Consequent	Drawn to reflect cultural divisions, often treated as a subsequent type.
superimposed 叠加边界	Imposed with little regard for existing cultural patterns.
Geometric	Follows straight lines or geometric rules; geometry does not establish origin.

Boundary classification: attempt



imposed straight line
crosses both communities

Original treaty history

An external authority imposes a **straight line** across two existing language communities without consulting them. Later the border **ceases to function**, but its checkpoints remain.

Your turn

Classify the line at creation by **geometry** and **origin**; classify the later **traces**. Why is one label alone incomplete?

Boundary classification: worked check

Dimension	Evidence and classification
Geometry	Straight-line rule: geometric.
Origin	Imposed without regard to existing communities: superimposed.
relic 残余边界 / relict	No longer a functioning political border, but traces remain.
Interpretation	Categories can overlap. A straight line can be negotiated; a curved line can be superimposed.

Land-cover evidence and political boundaries



Historical clear-cut logging photograph

A visible land-cover edge is not necessarily a political border.

The photograph shows landscape change. Establish jurisdiction with maps, records and boundary descriptions.

Do not infer who controls the land or how a boundary originated from this image alone.

Establishing and administering boundaries

Activity	What it does
Definition	Agrees wording describing the territorial division.
Delimitation	Draws the agreed line on a map.
Demarcation	Marks locations physically, for example with posts; a continuous fence is not required.
Administration	Manages crossings and enforcement. A legal line and its crossing arrangements are different questions.

Boundary disputes: mechanisms

Dispute	Original example
Definitional	The treaty's wording is interpreted differently.
Locational	Parties disagree on where the agreed description places the line.
Operational	They agree on the line but disagree about crossing rules.
Allocational	They disagree over resource use, such as water withdrawals.

Several issues can overlap. A resource dispute is not necessarily a failure to mark the border.

Political agreements and territorial divisions

1953 Korean Armistice

Established a **military demarcation line** and a **demilitarized zone** separating opposing forces. A buffer area is not simply another name for every international boundary.

the political **process**

the **line or zone** created

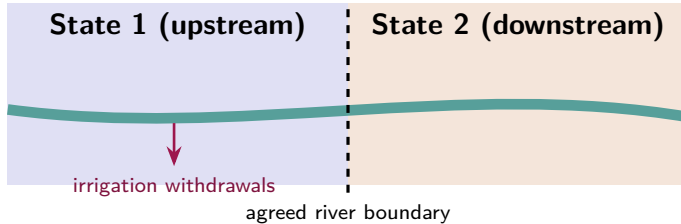
its **later function**

1884–1885 Berlin Conference

Established **rules for colonial territorial claims** in Africa; it was not one meeting drawing every modern African border.

Distinguish all three: neither example makes all borders alike.

River allocation: attempt



Original attempt

Two states **agree on a river boundary** but disagree over **irrigation withdrawals**. Explain the principal dispute and one mechanism.

Discuss before moving to the worked explanation.

River allocation: worked explanation

Allocational dispute withdrawals upstream can reduce the water available downstream.

- Both states may accept the **same boundary** while disagreeing about **resource rights**
- A shared resource can cross an agreed line
- Extraction limits or joint monitoring address a **different problem** from redrawing or marking the line

This prepares for **2025 Set 1 Q1(E)**: why land or sea boundaries may lead to resource disputes.

Maritime zones and rights

Zone	Extent and rights
Territorial sea	Up to 12 nautical miles from the relevant baseline; sovereignty is subject to passage rules.
exclusive economic zone (EEZ) 专属经济区	Up to 200 nautical miles from the baseline; specified resource rights, not complete control of movement.
Overlapping claims	Facing or adjacent coasts can require negotiated delimitation; a distance rule alone does not settle every claim.

The **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** 联合国海洋法公约 distinguishes these rights.

State shapes and access

Compact



Elongated



Fragmented



Perforated



Prorupted



AP HuG · U4 · five shapes of states

Shape suggests possible travel constraints. Terrain, transport, capital location and institutions also affect access and governance.

State shapes: conditional consequences

Shape	Possible access issue
Compact	Shorter distances can help, but mountains or weak infrastructure can still interrupt routes.
Elongated	Long distances between ends may complicate travel.
Fragmented	Separated parts may depend on air or sea links.
Perforated	Surrounds another state; border crossings and transit arrangements matter.
Prorupted	A projecting extension may have particular access or strategic significance.

4

Internal boundaries and voting

Internal boundaries and redistricting

Internal boundaries organise **jurisdictions**, **public services**, **electoral representation** and **data collection**.

Redistricting redraws electoral districts.

Gerrymandering 选区划分不公 manipulates district boundaries to advantage a political group; not every redraw is gerrymandering.

packing: concentrates opponents in **fewer** districts

cracking: splits them across districts where they are **outvoted**

Examine the **map and rules**, not just the election result.

Voting model: original attempt

A	A	A	B	B
A	A	A	B	B
A	A	A	B	B
A	A	A	B	B

20 voters: **12 A, 8 B**

- A fictional town: **four rows of five** cells; each row is **A, A, A, B, B**
- One voter per cell; everyone votes

Your turn

Create **four contiguous districts** of five voters, one seat each by simple majority. Plan R makes every row a district: **predict its winners**. Then count Plan P on the next slide.

Voting model: same voters, different boundaries

Plan R: row districts

A ₁	A ₁	A ₁	B ₁	B ₁
A ₂	A ₂	A ₂	B ₂	B ₂
A ₃	A ₃	A ₃	B ₃	B ₃
A ₄	A ₄	A ₄	B ₄	B ₄

Plan P: changed districts

A ₁	A ₁	A ₃	B ₃	B ₃
A ₁	A ₁	A ₁	B ₃	B ₃
A ₂	A ₂	A ₂	B ₄	B ₄
A ₂	A ₂	A ₄	B ₄	B ₄

Letter = voter's party; number = district; **thick lines** = district boundaries. Which party wins each seat?

Voting model: worked counts

Plan	Result
R: districts 1–4	Each has 3 A and 2 B. A wins four seats.
P: districts 1 and 2	Each has 5 A and 0 B. A wins two seats.
P: districts 3 and 4	Each has 1 A and 4 B. B wins two seats.
Boundary effect	Party totals stay 12 A and 8 B. Plan P packs A into two districts; R spreads B voters among A-majority districts.

Votes, seats and evidence

$$\text{vote share} = \frac{\text{A voters}}{\text{all voters}} \times 100$$

$$\text{A vote share} = \frac{12}{20} \times 100 = \mathbf{60\%}$$

$$\text{seat share} = \frac{\text{A seats}}{\text{all seats}} \times 100$$

$$\text{R: } \frac{4}{4} \times 100 = \mathbf{100\%}$$

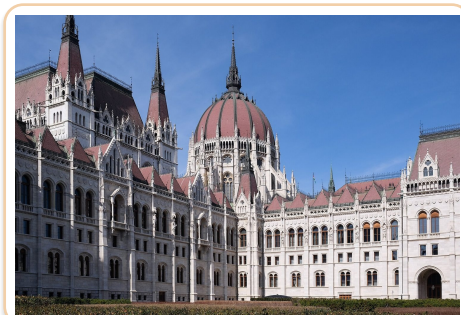
$$\text{P: } \frac{2}{4} \times 100 = \mathbf{50\%}$$

Same 60% of votes, very different seat shares: the model isolates **boundary effects**. Real legal judgments also need rules, voter geography and evidence of manipulation.

5

Forms of Governance

Institutions and constitutional evidence



Hungarian Parliament Building

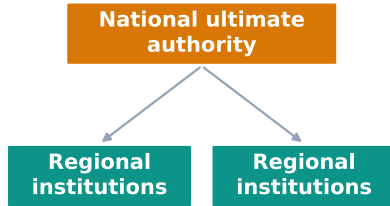
A parliament building does not reveal how powers are divided territorially.

Read which level makes laws in particular policy areas and how regional authority is established.

Federal/unitary does not by itself describe whether a state is democratic.

Unitary and federal arrangements

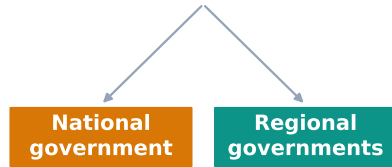
Unitary state



Regional powers derived from national authority

Federal state

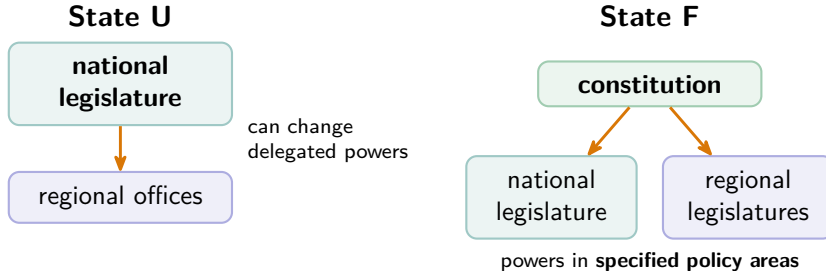
Constitution divides powers



Constitutionally assigned powers at both levels

Both can have regional institutions. Compare how regional powers are established and protected.

Governance comparison: attempt



Original arrangements: both have regional capitals

Identify each arrangement. Explain a **spatial consequence** for F and a possible **coordination issue**.

Governance comparison: worked check

Arrangement	Authority and consequence
unitary state 单一制国家	U: ultimate authority is concentrated nationally, even when local bodies have delegated or devolved powers.
federal state 联邦制国家	F: constitutionally divided powers can make regional capitals policy-making centres.
Benefits and limits	Regional variation may accommodate different needs; coordination can become more complex. Size or diversity alone does not determine the best system.

Canada and the United Kingdom

Canada: federal

The constitution assigns legislative powers to **national and provincial** institutions, so regional capitals can be **centres of policy decisions** (tested in 2025 Set 2 Q3(D)).

United Kingdom: devolution

Legislatures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland hold powers in **specified fields**; UK Parliament retains **legislative supremacy**.

Regional legislatures alone do **not** make a state federal: examine the **source and legal basis** of authority.

6

Devolution and Challenges to Sovereignty

Devolution, autonomy and independence

Devolution 权力下放 transfers or disperses power to subnational units; broad AP usage includes fragmentation that can end in state disintegration.

Autonomy 自治 a degree of self-government: it can satisfy regional demands within a state; it is not automatically independence.

the **actors**

their **demands**

the **state response**

Do not predict that every difference in ethnicity, geography or income produces the same outcome.

Devolutionary factors and mechanisms

Factor	Possible mechanism
Physical separation	Distance or barriers can make central services less accessible and strengthen demands for regional authority.
Unequal development	Perceived exclusion from investment can encourage autonomy demands.
Ethnic separatism / irredentism	A group seeks separation, or a movement seeks territory in another state on national-identity grounds.
Coercion and violence	Ethnic cleansing forcibly removes a group from an area; terrorism uses violence or threats for political purposes. Both can destabilise authority, with different mechanisms.

Border administration and devolution



US–Mexico border fence

An international fence is not direct evidence of regional devolution.

The image illustrates boundary administration. To establish devolution, identify which powers moved from the centre to a regional institution.

A hard border and an autonomous region are different kinds of evidence.

International organisations and sovereignty

Supranational organisations 超国家组织 coordinate **above the state scale**; their legal powers differ.

EU

UN

NATO

ASEAN

African Union

Arctic Council

- Cooperation can address **environment**, **trade** and **security**, while common commitments **constrain** national choices
- UN General Assembly recommendations are not binding Security Council decisions or EU rules in transferred areas: **check the organisation and rule**

Common river standard: attempt

Original agreement

Several states adopt a **shared river-pollution standard** and **joint monitoring**.

Your turn

- 1 Explain one **benefit** and one **constraint** on national decisions.
- 2 Identify the evidence needed to assess actual **compliance**.
- 3 How could communication technology help either the **joint institution** or an **opposition movement**?

Common river standard: worked reasoning

✓ **benefit:** shared monitoring identifies pollution crossing borders and supports coordinated action

constraint: common standards limit each member's freedom to permit weaker rules

- Assess **enforcement powers** and actual compliance: not every agreement binds in the same way
- Communication tools may help institutions exchange data or movements organise; they also help states **monitor**: technology is not automatically beyond state control

7

Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces

Cohesion depends on groups and scale

Concept	Direction and condition
Centrifugal forces 离心力	Weaken cohesion at the specified scale, for example exclusion that fuels separatist demands.
Centripetal forces 向心力	Strengthen cohesion, for example equitable access and inclusive institutions.
Ethnic nationalism	Can unite an ethnic community while excluding others and weakening wider state cohesion.
failed states 失败国家	Broad textbook term for severe loss of authority and service provision; not the inevitable end of every disagreement.

ethnonationalism 族裔民族主义: specify whose cohesion increases and at what scale.

Cohesion: original attempt

a **rail programme**
connects previously
underserved regions

a **language policy**
provides services only
in one group's language

Your turn

- 1 Explain how each policy could affect **cohesion**. Specify **which groups** and **which scale**.
- 2 What evidence would challenge the claim that every national language policy is **centripetal**?

Cohesion: worked explanation

Rail programme

Better transport can reduce isolation and improve access to jobs and services, potentially **increasing attachment** to the wider state.

Investigate **who benefits** from routes and fares.

Exclusive language rule

May strengthen **one group's** common identity while reducing **others'** access and sense of inclusion.

Group cohesion and state cohesion can move **differently**.

The **mechanism and affected groups** determine the classification, not the policy name alone.

Built form and political cohesion



Hong Kong skyline

A skyline does not measure political loyalty or state cohesion.

Built form can show concentrated development. Political effects need evidence about access, distribution, identity and institutions.

Do not infer shared loyalties or inevitable unity from a dense city image.

8

Exam tips

Political geography: retrieval

- 1 Can a boundary be both geometric and superimposed? What evidence establishes each?
- 2 Why do regional capitals alone not establish federalism?
- 3 How can a resource dispute occur across an agreed boundary?
- 4 Why can the same policy strengthen one group's identity and weaken state cohesion?

Political geography: retrieval checks

Question	Reasoning
Boundary categories	Geometry and imposition are different dimensions; both can describe one line.
Federalism	Determine the constitutional source of powers rather than counting regional offices.
Resources	A shared river or deposit can create competing allocation claims even when location is agreed.
Cohesion	Inclusion and benefits can differ between groups; specify the scale and mechanism.

Check yourself

Original transfer task

A state creates an **elected island legislature** with control over schools but retains defence and foreign policy. It also joins a **regional agreement** on fishing rights.

Your turn

- 1 Why does neither change alone establish the end of **independent statehood**?
- 2 What evidence distinguishes **devolution** from **supranational cooperation**?
- 3 One possible **cohesion benefit** and one possible **coordination cost** of the island arrangement.