The Ultimate AP® Human Geography Unit 4 Cheat Sheet

4.1 Introduction to Political Geography

Core Terms

State: politically organized territory w/ a permanent population, defined borders, a government & sovereignty.

Nation: a group of people w/ shared culture, language, history or ethnicity who see themselves as one people.

Sovereignty: a state's ultimate control over its own territory & affairs, free from outside interference.

State–Nation Combinations

Type	Meaning	Example
Nation-state	1 nation, 1 state	Japan, Iceland
Multinational	Many nations	Russia, Canada
Multistate nat.	1 nation, 2+ states	Koreans
Stateless nat.	No state of own	Kurds, Palestinians
Autonomous reg.	Self-rule inside	Nunavut, Tibet

Nation-states are rare: few states are culturally uniform; most contain minorities w/ distinct identities.

Kurds: ~30 million people split across Turkey, Iraq, Iran & Syria; the largest stateless nation in the world.

Political Map Patterns

Map today: ~195 states; borders reflect colonialism, wars, treaties & independence movements.

Semi-autonomous regions: some areas govern themselves within a state (Scotland, Hong Kong, Greenland).

Contested territory: Taiwan, Kashmir & Western Sahara show sovereignty that other states dispute.

Microstates: tiny sovereign states (Vatican City, Monaco, Singapore) still have full sovereignty over their land.

⚠ Nation ≠ state. A nation is a PEOPLE; a state is a TERRITORY w/ a government & sovereignty.

✓ FRQ: name the type (stateless nation), give an example (Kurds) & explain a consequence (separatist conflict).

4.2–4.3 Political Processes & Power

Colonialism & Imperialism

Colonialism: a state takes & settles distant territory, imposing its government, culture & economy (British India).

Imperialism: extending power over other territories by force or economic control, w/ or w/o settlers.

Berlin Conference (1884–85): Europeans divided Africa w/ little regard for ethnic groups → later conflicts.

Sykes-Picot (1916): Britain & France split the Middle East, drawing borders that split & mixed ethnic groups.

Independence & After

Independence movements: decolonization after WWII created dozens of new states in Africa & Asia.

Neocolonialism: former colonial powers or rich states keep economic & political influence w/o direct rule.

USSR collapse (1991): split into 15 independent states; Yugoslavia broke apart violently in the 1990s.

Self-determination: the idea that nations should govern themselves; drove decolonization & new states.

Power & Territoriality

Concept	Meaning
Territoriality	Control of space
Shatterbelt	Contested, unstable zone
Choke point	Narrow passage, e.g., Hormuz
Geopolitics	Space + power strategy

Territoriality: people & states shape space to show ownership & power (borders, flags, walls, checkpoints).

Political power is expressed geographically through control of land, resources, sea routes & people.

⚠ Colonial borders often ignored cultural regions; link them to later conflict for causation points on FRQs.

✓ Use specific examples: Berlin Conference → Rwanda or Nigeria; Sykes-Picot → Kurdish & Iraqi tensions.

4.4 Defining Political Boundaries

How Boundaries Are Made

Boundary: a vertical plane that divides states' territory, airspace & the ground below, including mineral rights.

Steps: defined (treaty language) → delimited (drawn on a map) → demarcated (marked w/ fences, posts).

Administered: the state actually enforces the boundary & controls movement across it (border posts, patrols).

Frontier: a zone w/ no clear boundary or control (historic: Arabian Peninsula interior); rare today.

Genetic Boundary Types

Type	Drawn	Example
Antecedent	Before settlement	US–Canada (49th)
Subsequent	After settlement	Most of Europe
Consequent	Follows culture	India–Pakistan
Superimposed	Forced by outsiders	Africa (colonial)
Relic	No longer used	Berlin Wall

Physical vs. Geometric

Physical (natural): follows rivers, mountains or lakes (Rio Grande, Pyrenees); rivers can shift course.

Geometric: straight lines of latitude/longitude (49th parallel); ignore physical & cultural features on the ground.

Consequent is also called ethnographic: it tries to follow language or religion lines (India–Pakistan, 1947).

Superimposed lines often split ethnic groups & joined rivals → civil wars, secession movements & refugees.

Example: the Berlin Conference split the Maasai between Kenya & Tanzania, a superimposed line.

⚠ A boundary can be 2 types at once: US–Canada (49th) is antecedent AND geometric. Name both if asked.

✓ Map stimulus: straight lines in Africa or the Middle East → superimposed & geometric, drawn by colonizers.

4.5 The Function of Political Boundaries

Boundary Disputes

Dispute	Over	Example
Definitional	Treaty wording	Chile–Argentina
Locational	Where line is	Kashmir
Operational	Crossing rules	US–Mexico
Allocational	Resources	S. China Sea

Functions: boundaries control trade, migration, security & resources; they can unite or divide people.

Open vs. closed: Schengen Area lets people cross freely; Korean DMZ is one of the most closed borders.

Walls & fences: Israel–West Bank barrier & US–Mexico wall show operational disputes & tighter control.

Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Zone	From coast	State rights
Territorial sea	12 nm	Full sovereignty
Contiguous zone	24 nm	Customs, law
EEZ	200 nm	Fish, oil, gas
High seas	Beyond	Open to all

EEZ: exclusive rights to fish & seabed resources (oil, gas); other states' ships can still sail through freely.

Islands matter: a small island can claim a huge EEZ → disputes (Spratly Islands, South China Sea).

Arctic: melting ice opens shipping & oil, so Russia, Canada, Denmark & the US file competing seabed claims.

Other Shared Spaces

Antarctica: Antarctic Treaty (1959) sets aside claims for science; the Arctic is contested as ice melts.

Water disputes: shared rivers (Nile, Tigris–Euphrates) lead to allocational conflicts over upstream dams.

⚠ Allocational = resources (oil, water, fish); locational = where the line sits. Don't swap them.

4.6 Internal Boundaries & Voting

Redistricting

Reapportionment: House seats are redistributed among US states after each 10-year census (435 seats total).

Redistricting: redrawing district lines within a state so each district has about equal population after a census.

Who draws: usually state legislatures; some states use independent commissions to reduce bias.

Census: population counts every 10 yrs set both reapportionment & redistricting; undercounts cost seats.

Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering: drawing district lines to favor a party or group; districts often have odd shapes.

Tactic	How it works
Cracking	Spread voters thin
Packing	Cram voters in 1 district
Hijacking	Pit 2 incumbents together
Kidnapping	Move incumbent's base out

Effect: a party can win more seats than its share of votes; fewer competitive elections & more partisanship.

Majority-minority district: drawn so a minority group is the majority; aims to boost representation.

Shaw v. Reno (1993): districts drawn mainly by race can be challenged under equal protection (NC case).

Other Internal Boundaries

Internal lines: states, counties, cities, school districts & reservations shape services & identity.

School districts: lines tied to property taxes can deepen inequality between rich & poor areas.

⚠ Reapportionment = seats between states; redistricting = lines within a state. A classic mix-up on MCQs.

✓ Map of districts? Point out cracking vs. packing & explain how each one changes the number of seats won.

4.7 Forms of Governance

Unitary vs. Federal

	Unitary	Federal
Power	Central gov't	Shared w/ regions
Best for	Uniform culture	Large, diverse
Examples	France, Japan	US, India, Brazil
Risk	Ignores minorities	Regional rivalry

Unitary state: power concentrated in the national government; regions carry out central policies.

Federal state: power divided between national & regional governments (states, provinces), each w/ its own laws.

Why federal: gives minority regions a voice (Canada's Québec, India's language-based states).

Nigeria: federal system of 36 states tries to balance the mostly Muslim north & mostly Christian south.

Shifting Power

Devolution in unitary states: UK gave Scotland, Wales & N. Ireland their own parliaments (1990s).

Spain: unitary but w/ strong autonomous communities like Catalonia & the Basque Country (own police, taxes).

Centralization risk: unitary states may suppress minority cultures & languages, fueling separatism.

Scale of Governance

Scales: local → regional → national → supranational; each level controls different decisions & services.

Example: US schools are run locally, funded by states & partly regulated federally (3 scales at once).

Confederation: loose union of sovereign states w/ a weak center (early US Articles, today's EU partly).

⚠ Federal ≠ democratic & unitary ≠ authoritarian. These terms describe how power is divided, not who holds it.

✓ Explain WHY a state chose its form: size & cultural diversity → federal; small & uniform → unitary.

4.8–4.9 Devolution & Challenges to Sovereignty

Devolutionary Factors

Devolution: power shifts from the central government to regional governments or groups (UK, Spain, Belgium).

Factor	Example
Ethnic/cultural	Catalonia, Québec
Economic	N. Italy's wealth
Physical distance	Corsica, Hawaii
Terrorism/violence	Basque ETA
Irredentism	Russia–Crimea

Irredentism: claiming territory in another state b/c people there share your culture or history (Russia in Crimea, 2014).

Balkanization: a state breaks into smaller, often hostile states (former Yugoslavia, 1990s → 7 states today).

Outcomes: autonomy, new states (South Sudan, 2011), civil war or a failed state (Somalia); rarely peaceful.

Physical geography: islands & mountains isolate groups, strengthening separate identities (Corsica, Kashmir).

Supranational Organizations

Supranationalism: 3+ states give up some sovereignty to cooperate on trade, defense or environment.

Examples: UN, EU (shared currency & open borders), NATO (defense), ASEAN, AU, USMCA, Arctic Council.

Brexit (2020): UK left the EU, showing nationalism pushing back against supranational power over borders & trade.

Sovereignty trade-off: members gain trade, security & aid but give up some control over law & borders.

Other Challenges

Communication tech: internet & social media spread ideas across borders, organizing protests & separatism.

⚠ Devolution weakens the state from WITHIN; supranationalism shares power ABOVE the state.

4.10 Centrifugal & Centripetal Forces

Forces Defined

Centripetal: unify a state: shared nationalism, language, religion, infrastructure & strong institutions.

Centrifugal: divide a state: ethnic conflict, uneven development, weak government, separatism.

Centripetal	Centrifugal
National anthem, flag	Ethnic separatism
Shared language	Rival languages
Good transport links	Isolated regions
Fair economic growth	Uneven development

Consequences

Failed state: government can't control territory or provide basic services (Somalia, Yemen); armed groups fill the gap.

Ethnic nationalism: can drive independence (South Sudan) or genocide (Rwanda, 1994; Bosnia, 1995).

Uneven development: rich regions resent subsidizing poor ones (Catalonia, Northern Italy) → push for autonomy.

Infrastructure: roads, rail & national media link regions & build unity (centripetal), as w/ the US interstates.

Stronger unity: centripetal forces can build cooperation (post-apartheid South Africa, Switzerland).

Putting It Together

Same factor, 2 effects: religion unified Poland vs. communism but divided India & Pakistan.

Scale: a force can unite a region (Catalan identity) while dividing the state (Spain); always name the scale.

Belgium: Dutch-speaking Flanders vs. French-speaking Wallonia → federal reforms to keep 1 state.

⚠ Always tie a force to a specific state & explain the outcome; a list of forces alone won't score.

✓ FRQ chain: centrifugal force → devolution → autonomy or independence. Show each link w/ a real example.