

AP HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

UNIT 4

Political Patterns and Processes



12–17%
AP EXAM WEIGHTING



~19–20
CLASS PERIODS

The icon consists of a white circle containing a blue square with the letters 'AP' in white. Below the square is a small blue horizontal line with two short vertical lines extending downwards, resembling a computer monitor or a stylized 'A'.

Remember to go to [AP Classroom](#) to assign students the online **Personal Progress Check** for this unit.

Whether assigned as homework or completed in class, the **Personal Progress Check** provides each student with immediate feedback related to this unit's topics and skills.

Personal Progress Check 4

Multiple-choice: ~30 questions

Free-response: 1 question

- 1 stimulus

Political Patterns and Processes



Developing Understanding

BIG IDEA 1

Patterns and Spatial Organization **PSO**

- How do historical and current events influence political structures around the world?

BIG IDEA 2

Impacts and Interactions **IMP**

- How are balances of power reflected in political boundaries and government power structures?

BIG IDEA 3

Spatial Patterns and Societal Change **SPS**

- How can political, economic, cultural, or technological changes challenge state sovereignty?

This unit addresses the political organization of the world. Building on knowledge of populations and cultural patterns learned in previous units, students examine the contemporary political map and the impact of territoriality on political power and on issues of identity for peoples. Students also look at the different types of political boundaries, how they function, and their scale, as they consider both internal and international boundaries. The interplay of political and cultural influences may cause tensions over boundaries to arise, such as sovereign states making claims on what other states consider to be international waters.

Students also examine forms of government and how forces such as devolution may alter the functioning of political units and cause changes to established political boundaries. Separatist and independence movements that challenge the sovereignty of political states may arise from economic and nationalistic forces, as seen in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Spain. The influence of supranational organizations such as the United Nations or European Union and their role in global affairs presents another challenge to nationalist sovereignty. Student understanding of cultural patterns and processes helps inform their understanding of the consequences of centrifugal and centripetal forces.

UNIT AT A GLANCE

Enduring Understanding	Topic	Suggested Skill	Class Periods
			~19–20 CLASS PERIODS
PSO-4	4.1 Introduction to Political Geography	4.A Identify the different types of information presented in visual sources.	
	4.2 Political Processes	3.E Explain what maps or data imply or illustrate about geographic principles, processes, and outcomes.	
	4.3 Political Power and Territoriality	5.B Explain spatial relationships across various geographic scales using geographic concepts, processes, models, or theories.	
IMP-4	4.4 Defining Political Boundaries	1.D Describe a relevant geographic concept, process, model, or theory in a specified context.	
	4.5 The Function of Political Boundaries	5.D Explain the degree to which a geographic concept, process, model, or theory effectively explains geographic effects across various geographic scales.	
	4.6 Internal Boundaries	5.A Identify the scales of analysis presented by maps, quantitative and geospatial data, images, and landscapes.	
	4.7 Forms of Governance	2.A Describe spatial patterns, networks, and relationships.	
SPS-4	4.8 Defining Devolutionary Factors	3.E Explain what maps or data imply or illustrate about geographic principles, processes, and outcomes.	
	4.9 Challenges to Sovereignty	5.C Compare geographic characteristics and processes at various scales.	
	4.10 Consequences of Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces	5.C Compare geographic characteristics and processes at various scales.	
 Go to AP Classroom to assign the Personal Progress Check for Unit 4. Review the results in class to identify and address any student misunderstandings.			

SAMPLE INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

The sample activities on this page provide ways to integrate the teaching of skills and content from the unit into your classroom instruction. They are completely optional and may be altered to suit the needs of your class. Please refer to the Instructional Approaches section beginning on page 133 for more examples of activities and strategies.

Activity	Topic	Sample Activity
1	4.6	Think-Pair-Share Have students individually think through the question, How can the way voting district boundaries are drawn impact election outcomes? Then have students gather evidence/examples to refine and/or support their thoughts. Students can then discuss their response with a peer. A whole-class discussion can follow focused on the issue of scale and how, due to internal political boundaries, it can appear that a subnational unit is in support of one candidate or party when in fact changing the scale may reveal variation in candidate or party loyalties.
2	4.8	Guided Discussion This umbrella strategy allows a teacher to use multiple techniques with students in a lesson. For this topic, use brainstorming and quickwrite as strategies to help students understand how division of groups by physical geography, ethnic separatism, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, economic and social problems, and irredentism may prompt devolutionary movements in a state.
3	4.10	Graphic Organizer Students should use a cause-and-effect graphic organizer to learn about the differing potential results of centrifugal and centripetal forces. Once students have identified the consequences of each, you can then ask them to look for contemporary examples of the consequences, which may be negative or positive. Ask students to discuss how different groups might have different interpretations of the nature of the consequences. For example, the breakup of a state will be viewed negatively by the formal state government but positively by separatists.



Unit Planning Notes

Use the space below to plan your approach to the unit. Consider how you want to pace your course and your methods of instruction and assessment.

SUGGESTED SKILL



Source Analysis

4.A

Identify the different types of information presented in visual sources.



AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- Classroom Resources > [Scale](#)

TOPIC 4.1

Introduction to Political Geography

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

PSO-4

The political organization of space results from historical and current processes, events, and ideas.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

PSO-4.A

For world political maps:

- Define the different types of political entities.
- Identify a contemporary example of political entities.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

PSO-4.A.1

Independent states are the primary building blocks of the world political map.

PSO-4.A.2

Types of political entities include nations, nation-states, stateless nations, multinational states, multistate nations, and autonomous and semiautonomous regions, such as American Indian reservations.

TOPIC 4.2

Political Processes

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

PSO-4

The political organization of space results from historical and current processes, events, and ideas.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

PSO-4.B

Explain the processes that have shaped contemporary political geography.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

PSO-4.B.1

The concepts of sovereignty, nation-states, and self-determination shape the contemporary world.

PSO-4.B.2

Colonialism, imperialism, independence movements, and devolution along national lines have influenced contemporary political boundaries.

SUGGESTED SKILL

 *Data Analysis*

3.E

Explain what maps or data imply or illustrate about geographic principles, processes, and outcomes.



AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- Classroom Resources > [Maps and Spatial Thinking Skills in the AP Human Geography Classroom](#)

SUGGESTED SKILL



Scale Analysis

5.B

Explain spatial relationships across various geographic scales using geographic concepts, processes, models, or theories.



AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- Classroom Resources > [Scale](#)

TOPIC 4.3

Political Power and Territoriality

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

PSO-4

The political organization of space results from historical and current processes, events, and ideas.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

PSO-4.C

Describe the concepts of political power and territoriality as used by geographers.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

PSO-4.C.1


Political power is expressed geographically as control over people, land, and resources, as illustrated by neocolonialism, shatterbelts, and choke points.

PSO-4.C.2

Territoriality is the connection of people, their culture, and their economic systems to the land.

TOPIC 4.4

Defining Political Boundaries

SUGGESTED SKILL *Concepts and Processes***1.D**

Describe a relevant geographic concept, process, model, or theory in a specified context.

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING**IMP-4**

Political boundaries and divisions of governance, between states and within them, reflect balances of power that have been negotiated or imposed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE**IMP-4.A**

Define types of political boundaries used by geographers.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**IMP-4.A.1**

Types of political boundaries include relic, superimposed, subsequent, antecedent, geometric, and consequent boundaries.

SUGGESTED SKILL

 Scale Analysis

5.D

Explain the degree to which a geographic concept, process, model, or theory effectively explains geographic effects across various geographic scales.



AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- Classroom Resources > [Scale](#)

TOPIC 4.5

The Function of Political Boundaries

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

IMP-4

Political boundaries and divisions of governance, between states and within them, reflect balances of power that have been negotiated or imposed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

IMP-4.B

Explain the nature and function of international and internal boundaries.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

IMP-4.B.1

Boundaries are defined, delimited, demarcated, and administered to establish limits of sovereignty, but they are often contested.

IMP-4.B.2

Political boundaries often coincide with cultural, national, or economic divisions. However, some boundaries are created by demilitarized zones or policy, such as the Berlin Conference.

IMP-4.B.3

Land and maritime boundaries and international agreements can influence national or regional identity and encourage or discourage international or internal interactions and disputes over resources.

IMP-4.B.4

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea defines the rights and responsibilities of nations in the use of international waters, established territorial seas, and exclusive economic zones.

TOPIC 4.6

Internal Boundaries

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

IMP-4

Political boundaries and divisions of governance, between states and within them, reflect balances of power that have been negotiated or imposed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

IMP-4.B

Explain the nature and function of international and internal boundaries.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

IMP-4.B.5

Voting districts, redistricting, and gerrymandering affect election results at various scales.

SUGGESTED SKILL *Scale Analysis***5.A**

Identify the scales of analysis presented by maps, quantitative and geospatial data, images, and landscapes.

**AVAILABLE RESOURCES**

- Classroom Resources > [Scale](#)
- Classroom Resources > [Maps and Spatial Thinking Skills in the AP Human Geography Classroom](#)

SUGGESTED SKILLS

 *Spatial Relationships*

2.A

Describe spatial patterns, networks, and relationships.



AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- Classroom Resources > [Scale](#)

TOPIC 4.7

Forms of Governance

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

IMP-4

Political boundaries and divisions of governance, between states and within them, reflect balances of power that have been negotiated or imposed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

IMP-4.C

Define federal and unitary states.

IMP-4.D

Explain how federal and unitary states affect spatial organization.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

IMP-4.C.1

Forms of governance include unitary states and federal states.

IMP-4.D.1

Unitary states tend to have a more top-down, centralized form of governance, while federal states have more locally based, dispersed power centers.

TOPIC 4.8

Defining Devolutionary Factors

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

SPS-4

Political, economic, cultural, or technological changes can challenge state sovereignty.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

SPS-4.A

Define factors that lead to the devolution of states.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

SPS-4.A.1

Factors that can lead to the devolution of states include the division of groups by physical geography, ethnic separatism, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, economic and social problems, and irredentism.

SUGGESTED SKILL **Data Analysis****3.E**

Explain what maps or data imply or illustrate about geographic principles, processes, and outcomes.

**AVAILABLE RESOURCES**

- Classroom Resources > [Maps and Spatial Thinking Skills in the AP Human Geography Classroom](#)

SUGGESTED SKILL

 *Scale Analysis*

5.C

Compare geographic characteristics and processes at various scales.

TOPIC 4.9

Challenges to Sovereignty

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

SPS-4

Political, economic, cultural, or technological changes can challenge state sovereignty.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

SPS-4.B

Explain how political, economic, cultural, and technological changes challenge state sovereignty.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

SPS-4.B.1

Devolution occurs when states fragment into autonomous regions; subnational political-territorial units, such as those within Spain, Belgium, Canada, and Nigeria; or when states disintegrate, as happened in Eritrea, South Sudan, East Timor, and states that were part of the former Soviet Union.

SPS-4.B.2

Advances in communication technology have facilitated devolution, supranationalism, and democratization.

SPS-4.B.3

Global efforts to address transnational and environmental challenges and to create economies of scale, trade agreements, and military alliances help to further supranationalism.

SPS-4.B.4

Supranational organizations—including the United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Arctic Council, and African Union—can challenge state sovereignty by limiting the economic or political actions of member states.

TOPIC 4.10

Consequences of Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces

SUGGESTED SKILL

 *Scale Analysis***5.C**

Compare geographic characteristics and processes at various scales.

Required Course Content

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING**SPS-4**

Political, economic, cultural, or technological changes can challenge state sovereignty.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE**SPS-4.C**

Explain how the concepts of centrifugal and centripetal forces apply at the state scale.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**SPS-4.C.1**

Centrifugal forces may lead to failed states, uneven development, stateless nations, and ethnic nationalist movements.

SPS-4.C.2

Centripetal forces can lead to ethnonationalism, more equitable infrastructure development, and increased cultural cohesion.

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