KEY POINTS

- The modern political-territorial order is characterized by great power differentials. Many of these have roots in a world order developed during the age of European colonialism.
- Understanding state power requires looking not just at the characteristics of individual states but at the relationships between and among states.
- Geopolitics, a century-old sub-field of political geography, is concerned with the influence of different geographical conditions and understandings on the exercise of power.
- The European state model had a centralized, unitary framework. Federal systems were developed in the New World and in former colonies elsewhere.
- The exercise of central government power within states is facilitated by a well-developed primary core area and a well-functioning capital city.
- The spatial organization of voting districts is a fundamentally geographically phenomenon that can have profound impacts on who is represented and who is not.
- States are held together by centripetal forces such as nationalism, education, circulation, and the institutions of government; but they are also subject to centrifugal forces in the form of ethnic disunity, cultural differences, or regional disparities.

Many political geographers believe that the number of independent states will surpass 200 in the near future. These 200 countries will occupy the surface of a small planet of which over two-thirds is covered by water or ice! With such a large number of entities, some large and others very small, it is inevitable that equality will remain a mirage. Not only are there large as well as small states; there are also economically prosperous and poor states, stable and unstable states, states in the global economic core and states on the disadvantaged periphery. Many factors create this situation, including the historic position of the state in international economic and political networks. Also significant is the way states have organized themselves internally.

LARGE-SCALE INFLUENCES ON STATE POWER

Measuring the relative power of states is a complex and imprecise business. There is no question, however, that one of the most important long-term influences is the situation of a country in terms of global patterns of economic and political power. As noted in the previous chapter, several centuries ago part of Europe took advantage of an increasingly well-consolidated internal political order and newfound wealth to expand its influence to increasingly far-flung realms. Driven by motives ranging from economic self-interest to the desire to bring Christianity to the rest of the world, colonialism projected European power into the non-European world. The height of the colonial era came during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and Belgians consolidated their overseas holdings (Fig. 15-1). The Germans and Italians were latecomers on the colonial scene. Spain and Portugal lost their American possessions even before the Berlin Conference in 1884–1885 laid out the colonial map of Africa, and early in the twentieth century it was evident that small European countries would not be able to control large, distant empires forever.

Elsewhere in the world, two other colonial powers built major empires: Russia and Japan. The Russian em-
From the field notes

"The Portuguese led the way. That is what this monument said to me as I visited the harbor at Lisbon (Portugal). Dedicated to the early Portuguese navigators and explorers, the monument is clearly a source of national pride. Yet it represents something quite different in other parts of the world. The legacy of European colonialism is surely a complicated and controversial matter, but one thing is for sure: it profoundly and irrevocably changed the world."

The colonial powers were able to gain control over their empires by virtue of their economic, political, and military organization; when that organization failed, they lost their advantage. Russia’s internal weaknesses were exposed by its losses in the Far East (Japan decisively defeated the Russian armies in 1905). But during the heyday of colonialism the imperial powers exercised ruthless control over their domains and organized them for maximum economic exploitation. The capacity to install the infrastructures necessary for such efficient profiteering is itself evidence of the power relationships involved: entire populations were regimented in the service of the colonial ruler. Flows of raw materials were organized for the benefit of the colonial power, and the tangible evidence of that organization (mines, railroads, ports, plantations) can still be seen. Moreover, these economic systems have survived the end of colonialism. In many cases raw material flows are as great as they were before the colonial era came to an end. And while the former colonies are now independent states, the influence of their former rulers continues, notably in the former French empire.

The long-term impacts of colonialism are many and varied. In conjunction with the colonial project, advances in health care, literacy, and the fight against some diseases diffused to parts of the colonial world. But one of the most powerful impacts of colonialism was the construction of a global order characterized by great differences in economic and political power. The European colonial enterprise gave birth to an even more globalized economic order in which the European states and areas dominated by European migrants emerged as the major centers of economic and political power. There was much diversity within this realm. Large colonial empires did not necessarily guarantee economic or political dominance (e.g., Spain in the late seventeenth century), and enormous poverty persisted within the most powerful of states. Moreover, selected countries in other parts of the world emerged as important powers (e.g., Japan). But the concentration of wealth that colonialism brought to the Europe, and to parts of the world dominated by European settlers, is at the heart of the highly uneven global distribution of power noted above. Reinforcing the unevenness were the extraction of wealth from colonies and the subservient relationship that developed between colonizer and colonized.

When asking questions about the power and position of individual states, it is critical to consider where those states are situated within the larger global geography of power relations. Yet that larger geography is not simply reducible to a historical map of colonization. Instead, that map provides an important backdrop to the economic and geopolitical circumstances that affect interstate power relations.

Economic Dimensions of Power

In Part Eight we will look in some detail at the geographical dimensions of the world economy, but for present purposes it is important to recognize that the capacity of states to influence the economic trends, to buy and sell strategic commodities, and to control the assets of major international actors are integral to the exercise of political power on the world stage. A state can win concessions or reciprocal agreements with other states through its economic strength, and it can outbid other states in the competition for access to resources. As
such, it is critical to understand where states are situated in the global economy.

The forces of colonialism described earlier played a key role in knitting together the economies of widely separated areas—giving birth to an economic order that was both large-scale and highly differentiated. In many instances colonial countries were able to amass great concentrations of wealth, but being a colonial power is not a prerequisite to being an economic power. Countries such as Switzerland, Singapore, and Australia have significant global clout even though they were never classic colonial powers—and that clout is tied in significant part to their positions in the global economy. Those positions were gained, in turn, through the access those countries had to the networks of production, consumption, and exchange in the wealthiest parts of the world and their ability to take advantage of that access.

There are many different ways of understanding the significance of a country's position in the global economy for its projection of power. Comparing the size of different state economies is one common approach. Yet countries do not exist in isolation from one another, and what happens in one can greatly affect what happens in another; the cascading impacts of the Asian economic
crisis of the late 1990s illustrate this point. Hence, the recent trend has been toward viewing states in relation to one another, as exemplified by World-Systems Analysis. Building on the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, proponents of World-Systems Analysis view the world as an interlocked system of states. They argue that the situation of individual states must be seen in terms of their spatial and functional relationship to the emergence of a global capitalist economy, which began to develop around 1450. They posit a world divided into three basic tiers: a global economic core, which is in the driver's seat; a periphery, which has little economic autonomy or influence; and a semi-periphery which keeps the world from being polarized into two extremes. These tiers are not static, and countries can move in and out of different tiers over time, but a similar group of countries has dominated the core for much of the last century.

There is considerable debate about the categories associated with World-Systems Analysis, as well as its heavy emphasis on economic factors in political development. Nonetheless, it has encouraged many to see the world political map as a system of interlinking parts that need to be understood in relation to one another. As such, its impact has been considerable in political geography, and it has become increasingly commonplace to refer to the kinds of core-periphery distinctions suggested by World-Systems Analysis. This perspective also ties political geography more closely to economic geography, where core-periphery theories have also become widely used (see Part Eight).
From the field notes

"Symbol of power: the Panama Canal. You cannot traverse this marvel of twentieth-century engineering without being reminded of the power of the United States to intervene in the affairs of foreign countries. There was no Panama when the United States decided to try where the French had failed: this narrow stretch of land between Atlantic and Pacific waters belonged to Colombia. But the U.S. fomented a local rebellion, helped and then recognized the victors, and created not only the Panama Canal but the Republic of Panama itself. There was no need to colonize the country; control over the vital waterway and its adjacent Canal Zone was enough. As we looked back toward the city of Colon on the Caribbean sea side, we saw one of the world's largest ocean liners, the Queen Elizabeth II, approach the Gatun locks. Imagine: a two-way system of locks and channels engineered and built by 1914 can still accommodate most of the large ships of the 2000s. This is a monument to planning and organization in the national interest."

Ratzel's organic theory held that a nation, which is an aggregate of organisms (human beings), would itself function and behave as an organism. This was an extreme form of the environmental determinism that was to dominate human geography for decades to come, but it was so speculative that it would probably have soon been forgotten had it not given rise to a subfield of political geography called geopolitics. Some of Ratzel's students translated his abstract writings into practical policies, and this led directly to the expansionist Nazi philosophies of the 1930s. One of Hitler's associates was a political geographer, Karl Haushofer, who was a strong advocate of geopolitics.

For some decades after World War II, the term geopolitics had such negative connotations that few political geographers, even those studying power relationships, would identify themselves as students of geopolitics. Time, along with more balanced perspectives, has reinstated geopolitics as an appropriate name for the study of the spatial and territorial dimensions of power relationships past, present, and future.

The Heartland Theory Not long after the publication of Ratzel's initial ideas, other geographers began looking at the overall organization of power on the Earth's surface and linked their conclusions to the fortunes of existing states. Prominent among them was the Oxford University geographer Sir Halford Mackinder (1861–1947). In 1904 he published an article titled "The Geographical Pivot of History" in the Royal Geographical Society's Geographical Journal. That article became one of the most intensely debated geographic publications of all time.

Mackinder was concerned with power relationships at a time when Britain had acquired a global empire through its naval supremacy. To many of his contemporaries, the oceans—avenues of colonial conquest—were the key to world domination, but not to Mackinder. He concluded that a land-based power, not a sea power, would ultimately rule the world. His famous article contained a lengthy appraisal of the largest and most populous landmass on Earth—Eurasia. At the heart of Eurasia, he argued, lay an impregnable, resource-rich "pivot area" extending from Eastern Europe to eastern Siberia (Fig. 15-2). This, he surmised, would become the base for world conquest, and the key to it was Eastern Europe.

Mackinder later renamed his "pivot area" the heartland, and his notion became known as the heartland theory. In his book Democratic Ideals and Reality (1919) he stated the theory as follows:

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland
Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island
Who rules the World Island commands the World

Geopolitics

What does it mean to control a particular space within the global political-territorial order? The first political geographer who studied this issue was the German professor Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904). Ratzel focused on the spatial aspects of state behavior within a system of states. He postulated that the state resembles a biological organism whose life cycle extends from birth through maturity and, ultimately, decline and death. To prolong its existence, the state requires nourishment, just as an organism needs food. Such nourishment is provided by the acquisition of less powerful competitors' territories and their cultural contents. If a state is confined within permanent and static boundaries and deprived of overseas domains, Ratzel argued, it will atrophy. Space is the state's essential, life-giving force.
When Mackinder proposed his heartland theory, there was little to foretell the rise of a superpower in the heartland. Russia was in disarray, having recently lost a war against Japan (1905), and was facing revolution. Eastern Europe was fractured. Germany, not Russia, was gaining power. But when the Soviet Union emerged and World War II gave Moscow control over much of Eastern Europe, the heartland theory attracted renewed attention.

**The Rimland Theory** Not all political geographers agreed with Mackinder’s assessment of the heartland. One of Mackinder’s critics, the Yale professor of international relations Nicholas Spykman, coined a geographic term that is still in use: *rimland*. Spykman argued that the Eurasian rim, not its heart, held the key to global power. In his book *The Geography of the Peace* (1944) he parodied Mackinder:

Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia
Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world

As Figure 15-2 shows, the rimland is a fragmented zone that is unlikely to fall under the sway of one superpower, as the heartland might. Spykman, who was more of a pragmatist than a theorist, saw a divided rimland as a key to the world’s balance of power. Today the rimland is still divided, but it encompasses powerful states in Western Europe as well as a potential superpower: China.

**Recent Developments** In Chapter 17 we return to the topic of global geopolitics, but it is appropriate here to reflect on the evolving power relationships that will shape the world in the twenty-first century. When Mackinder foresaw a world dominated by a single superpower, that notion, too, was revolutionary. The nineteenth century had produced (or was in the process of producing) a large number of states seeking global influence: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, the United States, and Japan among them. This was a multipolar world that was soon engulfed in a global war (1914–1918) and then another (1939–1945). World War I was global as a result of the colonial empires of the combatants; German and Allied forces fought battles in East Africa and elsewhere. World War II was global for additional reasons: it spilled southward and eastward beyond the confines of Europe, and it involved the United States and Japan.

Out of World War II came two newly strengthened powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The older powers in devastated Europe were losing their colonies and were in political and economic disarray. Although the United States aided Europe through its Marshall Plan and Japan through its enlightened postwar administration, no European or Asian power regained its former status. In the aftermath of World War II there were two clear superpowers. The world was a bipolar one divided into capitalist and communist camps. The Soviet Union dominated almost all of the heartland as Mackinder had defined it. The United States proved that Mackinder had underestimated the capacities of lands beyond his “world island” in Eurasia.

In the mid-1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States found itself the only surviving superpower. However, it was constrained by the growing power of extrastate institutions and organizations—most dramatically symbolized by the terrorist bombings of New York City and Washington, D.C., in September 2001, and by the unprecedented worldwide diffusion of weapons, including nuclear weapons. Briefly after World War II the United States, which used nuclear bombs to end that conflict, was the only state possessing the weapons that could have given it global supremacy. Today it is again the dominant force in world affairs, but this dominance is likely to be short-lived because the outlines of a new multipolar world are forming.

What are these outlines? Both Mackinder and Spykman might claim that their analyses were correct. A multipolar world is emerging in which the heartland and the rimland are represented by power cores. There are four potential foci of power on the “world island”: (1) Russia, in disarray after the collapse of the Soviet Union but still possessing an enormous military complex and major resources; (2) Europe, if it can find a way to sustain its drive toward integration and unification; (3) China, now energized by the spectacular economic growth of its eastern provinces; and (4) the United States, facing China across a Pacific that has become a highway of trade and diffusion. So the world today shares some features with that in Mackinder’s time: an unstable multipolar world with much potential for conflict.
THE CHARACTER OF
STATE TERRITORY

In *The Might of Nations* (1961), J. G. Stoessinger defines
power as "the capacity of a nation to use its tangible and
intangible resources in such a way as to affect the behav-
ior of other nations." As we have seen, that capacity is
shaped in significant part by a state's position in the
global economic and political order. But the makeup
and spatial organization of a state's territory can matter
as well.

Determining how the particular geographical char-
acteristics of a state affect its power is not an easy or
straightforward matter, however. Consider the issue of
population. We have already noted the differences in the
amounts of territory controlled by different states. In
terms of population, the range is even greater. Over half
the world's states have populations below 5 million;
nealy 50 have fewer than 1 million citizens. It might be
tempting to assume that states with small populations
can exercise very little power, whereas those with large
populations have great international clout. At its ex-
tremes, such an assumption might be tenable; most
states with very small populations have little power in a
world where decisions are made by their larger neigh-
bors, whereas India, China, the United States, or Indone-
sia cannot be ignored. Yet tiny Singapore exerts consid-
erable international influence, and China's large
population presents a great challenge for the country.

China has been undergoing dramatic economic
growth, of course. Whereas economies in Western Eu-
rope and North America are experiencing growth of 1 to
3 percent annually, China has been reporting growth of
7 to 10 percent—such a high rate that Chinese rulers are
trying to restrain it. At the beginning of the twenty-first
century China's economy was the third largest in the
world, behind the economies of the United States and
Japan. Yet in 2002 the Chinese people were earning just
a tiny fraction of what Americans or Japanese earn per
capita. And with over 1.3 billion people, and adding al-
most 13 million every year, every economic measure
must be divided by twelve hundred million. No matter
how fast an economy grows, that kind of arithmetic will
produce low per capita figures.

The point is that there is no "ideal" population size
for a state; there is not even an ideal population in rela-
tion to a particular territorial size. With a territory the size
of Montana and a limited natural resource base, Japan
has one of the dominant economies on Earth. An "over-
populated" country such as the Netherlands thrives,
while Liberia fractures. To understand this situation, we
must consider people's capacities for organization in light
of local circumstances—along with their position in the
global political and economic order. Japan, Hong Kong,
and Guangdong Province are examples of places where
favorable shifts in the global economy worked together
with a well-educated workforce to produce greater eco-
relative gains than those found among places with access
to abundant natural resources. More generally, efforts to
bring countries together and promote economic develop-
ment are evident in the building of everything from
school systems to road networks. Two important geo-
graphical clues to the organizational character of the state
can be found in the nature of the state's core area(s) and
in the size and functions of its capital city.

Core Areas

Several of the most influential European states grew over
many centuries from a *core area*, expanding into a re-
gional entity and absorbing territory along their frontiers.
Eventually, their expansion was halted when neighbor-
ing entities blocked them, boundaries were defined, and
their internal organization matured.

In most cases the original nucleus of these states still
functions as a core area. Many countries elsewhere in
the world also have well-defined core areas, even though
they are often much younger than their European coun-
terparts. You can discern core areas even on a small-
scale atlas map: here lie a country's major cities (usually
including the capital), its largest and densest population
cluster, its most intensive transport networks, and often
its most intensively cultivated farmlands. Here the na-
tional economy is best developed and circulation is most
efficient. If you travel away from the core area, you see
smaller towns, fewer factories, and more open land.

Japan's Kanto Plain is one of the world's leading na-
tional cores, centered on the city of Tokyo. Note that in-
tensive agriculture still plays a role in this highly urban-
ized heartland. France's Paris Basin is a more ancient
core area, centered on one of Europe's greatest prime
cities. In Egypt, the Cairo-Alexandria axis and the Nile
delta form the national core, and in Chile, Santiago lies in
what the Chileans call their country's *nucleo central*.

What role does a well-developed core area play in a
state? The apparent answer is an important one. Coun-
tries without recognizable, well-integrated cores (Gongo,
Chad, Mongolia, Bangladesh) may have notable capitals,
but these alone cannot easily provide a focus for the
state. By contrast, countries with core areas character-
ized by a mix of urban settlements and land uses are
often in a stronger position to promote a broad range of
economic development initiatives.

States that possess more than one core area—
*multicore states*—confront particular problems. If the
primary core area is dominant or if there is a secondary
core area that is not characterized by strong cultural dis-
continuities with the primary core, such problems may
be slight. This is the case in the United States, where the
primary core area still lies in the East and Northeast, and
includes the federal capital and the country's largest city
and commercial center. Many would regard coastal southern California as a secondary core area, but there are no strong cultural discontinuities with the East and Northeast. In Nigeria, by contrast, three core areas mark ethnically and culturally diverse parts of the state, and none is truly dominant. Nigeria's northern core area represents the Muslim heart of the country, the two southern cores center on two of its major population clusters.

**Capital Cities**

In most states, the **capital city** is the political nerve center of the country, its national headquarters and seat of government, and the center of national life. We recognize this special status by using the name of a country's capital interchangeably with that of the state itself; for example, a news report may say that "London's position has changed" or "Moscow is at odds with Ukraine."

The primacy of the capital is yet another manifestation of the European state model, one that has diffused worldwide. After they had gained independence, many former colonies spent lavishly on their capitals, not because this was essential to political or economic success but because the states were developing in the image of European states and capital cities such as London, Paris, Lisbon, or Brussels became the models.

In some countries the capital city is by far the largest and most economically influential city in the state, with a landscape designed to reflect a country's culture. Mexico City (Mexico), Jakarta (Indonesia), and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) all fit in this category. In none of these cases is there any other city that comes even close to rivaling the capital city in terms of size or influence. Cities of this sort are sometimes referred to as **primate cities**—a concept to which we will return in Chapter 21. Such cities are particularly common in countries with dominantly agriculture-based economies (e.g., Bangladesh and Ethiopia), and those with a history of centralized colonial rule (e.g., Kenya and Sri Lanka).

Some newly independent states decided to relocate their capital cities, again at enormous expense. Several did so in order to move the capital from a geographically peripheral situation to a more central one. Until recently Nigeria's capital was Lagos, located on the coast in the southwest of the country. A new capital has been constructed at Abuja, nearer the geographic center of the state. Malawi moved its capital from Zomba, deep in the south, to more central Lilongwe. In Pakistan, the capital was moved from the colonial headquarters of Karachi to Islamabad in the far north.

More recently, Malaysia has been in the process of relocating its capital from Kuala Lumpur, the former British colonial headquarters, to a completely new center called Putrajaya about 40 kilometers (25 miles) to the south. This move was prompted by the Malaysian government's desire to build a brand-new, ultramodern capital to symbolize the country's rapid economic growth and modernization.

Capital cities are of interest to cultural as well as political geographers because they are occasionally used to focus a society's attention on a national objective. In Pakistan's case, the transfer of the capital to Islamabad was part of a plan to orient the nation toward its historic focus in the interior and toward the north, where the country narrows between Kashmir, China, and Afghanistan. In Brazil, the decision to move the capital from historic Rio de Janeiro to Brasilia was made, in large part, to direct attention to the huge, sparsely populated yet poorly integrated interior. We have already noted Japan's transfer of its capital from Kyoto to Tokyo, a move that also had specific national objectives. The capital city thus can be used to achieve national aims and to promote change. Geographers sometimes refer to such cities as **forward capitals**.

Berlin once served as such a forward capital. During the nineteenth century, when the German state was forming, its western boundaries (with the Netherlands, Belgium, and, until 1870, France) were relatively stable. To the east, however, lay the frontier. There the Germans confronted the Poles and other Slavic nations, and the growing empire expanded into much of what is today Poland.

This eastward march was underscored by the choice of Berlin as the capital. Berlin lies not far from the Oder River, whose basin was Germany's easternmost territory until the 1860s. Most of Germany lay to the west of Berlin, but the capital helped to solidify Germany's eastern orientation.

A century later Germany lay defeated and divided. West Germany chose a new capital, Bonn; East Germany, under Soviet control, was governed from East Berlin. The German empire had lost its entire eastern frontier, and Poland now extended to the Oder River, on Berlin's doorstep.

When Germany was reunified in 1990, Germans debated the choice of a new capital. Many favored Bonn, located near the country's western border and symbolic of its new role in Europe. Many others preferred a return to Berlin. Still others wanted to put the past behind them and argued for a totally new choice, such as Hanover, near the center of the country. In the end, Berlin was selected—raising fears among those who remembered the city's role during times of war. At the turn of the twenty-first century, a giant construction program that transformed Berlin and symbolized its new era was erasing those memories.

In general, the capital city symbolizes the state; its layout, prominent architectural landmarks, public art, historic buildings and monuments, and often its religious structures, reflect the society's values and priorities. The capital may be employed as a unifying force and can assert the state's values internally as well as externally. If its
landscape images exclude important sectors of a state’s population, however, it can also be divisive. This helps to explain why debates are so intense over new monuments in Washington, D.C., or new construction projects in the heart of Paris, France.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL-GEOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

A well-integrated state consists of a stable, clearly bounded territory served by a well-developed infrastructure, an effective administrative framework, a productive core area, and a prominent capital. All states, however, confront divisive forces—some strong enough to threaten their very survival. The internal political organization of territory in a state can influence how these forces play out.

Unitary and Federal Systems

When the nation-state evolved in Europe, democracy as we now know it had not yet matured; governments could and did suppress dissent by forceful means. Most European governments were highly centralized; the capital city represented authority that stretched to the limits of the state. There were no clear efforts to accommodate minorities or outlying regions where the sense of national identity was weaker. Europe’s nation-states were unitary states, and their administrative frameworks were designed to ensure the central government’s authority over all parts of the state. France, for example, was divided into more than 90 départements, whose representatives came to Paris less to express regional concerns than to implement governmental decisions back home.

European notions of the state diffused to much of the rest of the world, but in the New World these notions did not always work well. When colonies freed themselves of European dominance, many found that conditions in their newly independent countries did not lend themselves to unitary systems of government. In the United States, Canada, and Australia the newness of the culture, the absence of an old primacy city, the lack of a clear core area, the vastness of the national territory, and the emergence of regionalism all required something other than highly centralized government. In Europe itself, some political philosophers had already theorized about alternatives to the unitary system, and regionalism in Scotland and Wales had become a concern in London. It was situations like these that led to the emergence of the federal state.

Federalism accommodated regional interests by vesting primary power in provinces, States, or other regional units over all matters except those explicitly given to the national government. The Australian geographer K. W. Robinson described a federation as “the most geographically expressive of all political systems, based as it is on the existence and accommodation of regional differences … federation does not create unity out of diversity; rather, it enables the two to coexist.”

In Europe, the only genuine, long-term federation was Switzerland, but conditions there were too different from those in the New World to allow it to serve as a model. For example, the choice of a capital city was a challenge for many federations. No region would agree to locate the capital in another region. As a result, federations often created new capitals, built on federal territories carved from one or more States. Thus the U.S. capital became neither New York nor Philadelphia, but Washington, D.C., built on a federal territory initially taken from Maryland and Virginia. The Australian capital became neither Sydney nor Melbourne but Canberra, established on federal territory taken from the State of New South Wales.

Federalism even spread to countries whose European settlers came from highly centralized unitary states. In Europe, few states were more strongly centralized than Spain and Portugal, yet Mexico and Brazil established federal systems. (Brazil moved its capital func-
Although the European colonial powers retained control over their empires in Africa and Asia, colonial rule mirrored the unitary system—only more so. Overseas domains were run with little or no consideration for local or regional cultures. When the colonial era came to an end, however, the federal idea seemed to hold promise for newly independent, ethnically and culturally divided countries. The British in particular attempted to create federal frameworks as the end of the empire approached. Their greatest success was India, where the transition to independence and the subsequent survival of the state may be attributed in large part to the federal framework created by British and Indian negotiators during the 1940s. In Africa, by contrast, the mechanisms of federation were put in place hastily and were based on contested territorial configurations (for

Figure 15.3 Regions of France. This map shows the 22 principal administrative regions of France, including Corsica. Source: From a map in H. J. de Blij and P. O. Muller, Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts, 10th ed. New York: Wiley, 2002, p. 74.
example, in Nigeria and Uganda). As a result, they failed to stabilize.

Today the divisive forces of regionalism are affecting not only recently formed federations but also the older unitary states of Europe. In response, European states are reconstructing their administrative frameworks; France, for example, has recognized 22 “regions,” which consist of groupings of the 96 départements dating back to the time of Napoleon (Fig. 15-3). These regions are geographic evidence of France’s attempt to decentralize governmental control. In similar ways, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and other older unitary states are adjusting to new political-geographical circumstances—new to Europe but well known to federal governments elsewhere.

Electoral Patterns

“All politics is local,” it is often said, and in truth a voter’s most direct and important contact with government is at the local level. Voters who feel that they can have little impact on national elections but have a clear voice in local elections still feel that they are participating in the political system. This can be a crucial factor in building a sense of commitment to the nation and what it stands for.

Electoral geographers seek to understand how the spatial configuration of electoral districts and voting patterns that emerge in particular elections reflect and influence social and political affairs. Various countries use different voting systems to elect their governments. In the 1994 South African election we could observe how the leaders of that society formulated a system that would provide majority rule while awarding some power to each of nine newly formed regions. The overall effect was to protect, to an extent, the rights of minorities in those regions. In the United States, proportional representation prevails in the House of Representatives (Congress), while the rights of States with small populations are protected in the Senate.

The geographic study of voting behavior is especially interesting because it relates the way people vote to their geographic environments. Maps of voting patterns often produce surprises that can be explained by other maps, and GIS technology has raised this kind of analysis to new levels. Church affiliation, income level, ethnic background, education level, and numerous other social factors are studied to learn why voters voted the way they did.

Probably the most practical area of electoral geography is the geography of representation. When there are a certain fixed number of seats for representatives in an elected legislature (such as the 435 congressional seats in the U.S. House of Representatives), there must be a fixed number of electoral districts from which those representatives are elected. Since the congressional seats are based on State population totals, it is up to each State to draw a map of congressional districts from which representatives will be elected.

Or is it? Will States draw their districting maps fairly, giving minorities an opportunity to elect their own representatives? After all, if a State has a population that is 80 percent white, 10 percent African-American, and 10 percent Hispanic, an electoral district map could easily result in white majorities in all districts and no minority representatives at all. After the 1990 census, the U.S. government instructed all States with substantial minority populations to construct so-called majority-minority districts (districts within which a minority would have the majority of the voters). In the hypothetical State described here, this districting would lead to the election of at least one African-American and one Hispanic representative from among 10 districts.

Reapportionment of the total number of representatives among the States goes on all the time because the population shifts; some States gain seats, whereas others lose. As a result, redistricting also occurs after every census, and within States (for State legislatures) it occurs more frequently than that. Ideally, a State’s congressional districts would, on the map, look relatively compact and contain roughly the same number of voters. In reality, our pluralistic society requires the construction of some oddly shaped districts in order to adhere to the majority-minority rule (Fig. 15-4).

Strange-looking districts that have been constructed to attain certain political ends are nothing new in American politics. In 1812, Governor Elbridge Gerry (pronounced with a hard G) of Massachusetts signed into law a district designed to give an advantage to his

Figure 15-4  Electoral Geography. Florida Congressional District No. 3 is an example of the spatial manipulation necessary to create majority-minority districts. In 1990, District 3 had about 310,000 African-American residents, 240,000 whites, and 16,000 Hispanics. In places, District 3 is no wider than U.S. Highway 90. Source: Map and data provided by Tanya de Blij, Geographer/Analyst for the Florida House of Representatives.