**Define Political geography**

**Political geography** is the field of [human geography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_geography) that is concerned with the study of both the spatially uneven outcomes of [political](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political) processes and the ways in which political processes are themselves affected by spatial structures. Conventionally political geography adopts a three-scale structure for the purposes of analysis with the study of [the state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_(polity)) at the centre, above this is the study of [international relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_relations) (or [geopolitics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geopolitics)), and below it is the study of localities. The primary concerns of the sub-discipline can be summarised as the inter-relationships between people, state, and territory.

Political geography has extended the scope of traditional political science approaches by acknowledging that the exercise of power is not restricted to states and bureaucracies, but is part of everyday life. This has resulted in the concerns of political geography increasingly overlapping with those of other human geography sub-disciplines such as economic geography, and, particularly, with those of social and cultural geography in relation to the study of the politics of place (see, for example, the books by David Harvey (1996) and Joe Painter (1995)). Although contemporary political geography maintains many of its traditional concerns.

## History of political geography:

The origins of political geography lie in the origins of human geography itself and the early practitioners were concerned mainly with the [military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military) and political consequences of the relationships between physical geography, state territories, and state power. In particular there was a close association with [regional geography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_geography), with its focus on the unique characteristics of regions, and [environmental determinism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_determinism) with its emphasis on the influence of the physical environment on human activities. This association found expression in the work of the German geographer [Friedrich Ratzel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Ratzel) who, in 1897 in his book *Politische Geographie*, developed the concept of [Lebensraum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebensraum) (living space) which explicitly linked the cultural growth of a nation with territorial expansion, and which was later used to provide academic legitimation for the imperialist expansion of the German [Third Reich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany) in the 1930s.

The British geographer [Halford Mackinder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halford_Mackinder" \o "Halford Mackinder) was also heavily influenced by environmental determinism and in developing his concept of the 'geopolitical pivot of history' or heartland (first developed in 1904) he argued that the era of sea power was coming to an end and that land based powers were in the ascendant, and, in particular, that whoever controlled the heartland of 'Euro-Asia' would control the world. This theory involved concepts diametrically opposed to the ideas of [Alfred Thayer Mahan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Thayer_Mahan) about the significance of *sea power* in world conflict. The [heartland theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heartland_theory) hypothesized the possibility of a huge empire being created which didn't need to use coastal or transoceanic transport to supply its military industrial complex, and that this empire could not be defeated by the rest of the world allied against it. This perspective proved influential throughout the period of the Cold War, underpinning military thinking about the creation of [buffer states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffer_state) between East and West in central Europe.

The heartland theory depicted a world divided into a *Heartland* (Eastern Europe/Western Russia); *World Island* (Eurasia and Africa); *Peripheral Islands* (British Isles, Japan, Indonesia and Australia) and *New World* (The Americas). Mackinder claimed that whoever controlled the Heartland would have control of the world. He used this warning to politically influence events such as the [Treaty of Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles), where buffer states were created between the [USSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USSR) and [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany), to prevent either of them controlling the Heartland. At the same time, Ratzel was creating a theory of states based around the concepts of Lebensraum and [Social Darwinism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Darwinism). He argued that states were analogous to 'organisms' that needed sufficient room in which to live. Both of these writers created the idea of a political and geographical [science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science), with an [objective](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Objectivity_(journalism)) view of the world. Pre-[World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) political geography was concerned largely with these issues of global power struggles and influencing state policy, and the above theories were taken on board by German geopoliticians (see [Geopolitik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geopolitik" \o "Geopolitik)) such as [Karl Haushofer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Haushofer) who - perhaps inadvertently - greatly influenced [Nazi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazism" \o "Nazism)political theory. A form of politics legitimated by 'scientific' theories such as a 'neutral' requirement for state expansion was very influential at this time.

The close association with environmental determinism and the freezing of political boundaries during the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War) led to a considerable decline in the importance of political geography which was described by Brian Berry in 1968 as 'a moribund backwater'. Although in other areas of human geography a number of new approaches were invigorating research, including quantitative spatial science, behavioural studies, and structural Marxism, these were largely ignored by political geographers whose main point of reference continued to be the regional approach. As a result much political geography of this period was descriptive with little attempt to produce generalisations from the data collected. It was not until 1976 that Richard Muir could argue that political geography might not be a dead duck but could in fact be a phoenix.

## Areas of study[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Political_geography&action=edit&section=2" \o "Edit section: Areas of study)]

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[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.23wmf14/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:13.8_scharf.png)

The [Brandenburg Gate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg_Gate) of the [Berlin Wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Wall)in 1961.

From the late-1970s onwards, political geography has undergone a renaissance, and could fairly be described as one of the most dynamic of the sub-disciplines today. The revival was underpinned by the launch of the journal *Political Geography Quarterly* (and its expansion to bi-monthly production as*Political Geography*). In part this growth has been associated with the adoption by political geographers of the approaches taken up earlier in other areas of human geography, for example, [Ron J. Johnston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ron_J._Johnston)'s (1979) work on electoral geography relied heavily on the adoption of quantitative spatial science, Robert Sack's (1986) work on territoriality was based on the behavioural approach, and Peter Taylor's (e.g. 2007) work on World Systems Theory owes much to developments within structural Marxism. However the recent growth in the vitality and importance of the sub-discipline is also related to changes in the world as a result of the end of the Cold War, including the emergence of a new world order (which as yet is only poorly defined), and the development of new research agendas, such as the more recent focus on social movements and political struggles going beyond the study of nationalism with its explicit territorial basis. Recently, too, there has been increasing interest in the geography of green politics (see, for example, David Pepper's (1996) work), including the geopolitics of environmental protest, and in the capacity of our existing state apparatus and wider political institutions to address contemporary and future environmental problems competently.