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HOW DO STATES SPATIALLY ORGANIZE THEIR GOVERNMENTS?

In the 1950s, a famous political geographer, Richard Hartshorne, described the forces within the state that unify the people as **centripetal** and the forces that divide them as **centrifugal**. Whether a state continues to exist, according to Hartshorne, depends on the balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Many political geographers have debated Hartshorne's theory, and most have concluded that we cannot select a given event or process and simply define it as centrifugal or centripetal. An event such as a war can pull the state together for a short time and then divide the state over the long term. Timing, scale, interaction, and perspective factor into unification and division in a state at any given point. Instead of creating a balance sheet of centripetal and centrifugal forces, governments attempt to unify states through nation-building, through structuring the government in a way that melds the nations within, by defining and defending boundaries, and through expressing control over all of the territory within those boundaries.

By looking at how different governments have attempted to unify the peoples and territories within their domains, we are reminded how important geography is. Governance does not take place in a vacuum. The unique characteristics of places shapes whether any possible governmental “solution” solves or exacerbates matters.

Form of Government

The internal political geographic organization of states can have an impact on state unity. Most states in the world are either unitary or federal states.

Until the end of World War II, many European states, including multinational states, were highly centralized, with the capital city serving as the focus of power. States made no clear efforts to accommodate minorities (such as Bretons in France or Basques in Spain) or outlying regions where identification with the state was weaker. Political geographers call these highly centralized states **unitary** governments. The administrative framework of a unitary government is designed to ensure the central government's authority over all parts of the state. The French government divided the state into more than 90 *départements*, whose representatives came to Paris not just to express regional concerns but to implement central-government decisions back home.

One way of governing a multinational state is to construct a *federal* system, organizing state territory into regions, substates (which we refer to as States), provinces, or cantons. In a strong **federal** system, the regions have much control over government policies and funds, and in a weak federal system, the central government retains a significant measure of power. Most federal systems are somewhere in between, with governments at the state scale and at the substate scale each having control over certain revenues and certain policy areas. Giving control over certain policies (especially culturally relative policies) to smaller-scale governments is one strategy for keeping the state as a whole together.

Federalism functions differently depending on the context. In Nigeria, the 36 constituent States choose their own judicial system. In the Muslim north, twelve States have Shari'a laws (legal systems based on traditional Islamic laws), and in the Christian and animist south, the States do not (Fig. 8.11). Shari'a law in the northern states of Nigeria is only applied to Muslims, not to Christians and Animists. The move to Shari'a law in the north came at the same time as democracy swept Nigeria in 2000. Nigerians in the north hoped stricter laws would help root out corruption among politicians, although it has failed to do so.



Figure 8.11 States in Nigeria with Shari'a Law.

Data from: BBC, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1962827.stm#map>.

In the United States, States take different approaches to matters such as the death penalty, access to alcohol (Fig. 8.12), and the right to carry concealed weapons but many of the fundamentals of the legal system do not differ among States.

Federalism accommodates regional interests by vesting primary power in provinces, States, or other regional units over all matters except those explicitly given to the central 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.”

Choosing a federal system does not always quell nationalist sentiment. After all, the multinational states of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia fell apart, despite their federalist systems, and the future of Belgium as a single state is uncertain.

Devolution

Devolution is the movement of power from the central government to regional governments within the state. Sometimes devolution is achieved by reworking a constitution to establish a federal system that recognizes the permanency of the regional governments, as Spain has done. In other places, governments devolve power without altering constitutions, almost as an experiment. In the United Kingdom, the Northern Ireland Assembly, a parliamentary body, resulted from devolution, but the British government suspended its activities in 2002 and then reinstated the assembly in 2007. Devolutionary forces can emerge in all kinds of states, old and young, large and small. These forces arise from several sources of internal division: ethnocultural, economic, and territorial.

Guest Field Note Interstate-40, near Blackwell, Arkansas.

In most states in the U.S., a “dry county” might cause one to think of a place where there is very little rain. But in the southern part of the U.S., there are many dry counties—that is, counties with laws forbidding the sale of packaged

alcohol. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, keeping counties dry was much easier than it is today. A hundred years ago, it took up to a day to travel to the next town or city on very poor roads. Today, with cars traveling 70 MPH on an interstate, the same trip takes a matter of minutes. Why would counties continue to ban alcohol sales today? Many of the reasons are cultural. Of the Arkansas residents who attend church, most are Baptists (see Figure 7.28) or other Protestant denominations. Many of these churches prohibit consumption of alcoholic beverages. The Arkansas legislature supports dry counties by requiring counties that want to sell packaged liquor to get 38 percent of the voters in the last election to sign a petition. It only takes 10 percent of that voter pool to get any other issue on the ballot. Today, however, many dry counties in Arkansas are known as “damp.” Damp counties are those where restaurants, country clubs and social organizations can apply and receive a license to serve alcohol by the drink. This arrangement seems counterintuitive to the idea of a dry county. But business and economic development authorities want damp counties to encourage investment and growth in the local economy.



Figure 8.12

Credit: Paul T. Gray, Jr., Russellville High School

Ethnocultural Devolutionary Movements

Many of Europe's devolutionary movements came from nations within a state that define themselves as being ethnically, linguistically, or religiously distinct.

The capacity of ethnocultural forces to stimulate devolutionary processes has been evident, for example, in eastern Europe. Parts of the eastern European map have changed quite drastically over the past two decades, and two countries, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, succumbed to devolutionary pressures. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the process was peaceful: Czechs and Slovaks divided their country, creating a new international border. As Figure 8.13 shows, however, one of the two new states, Slovakia, is not homogeneous. About 11 percent of Slovaks are Hungarian, and that minority is concentrated along the border between Slovakia and Hungary. The Hungarian minority, concerned about linguistic and cultural discrimination, has at times demanded greater autonomy or self-governance to protect its heritage in the new state of Slovakia.



Figure 8.13 Ethnic Mosaic of Eastern Europe.

© Adapted (in part) with permission from George Hoffma ed., *Europe in the 1990s: A Geographical Analysis*, 6th rev. ed., p. 551.

Compared to the constituent units of the former Yugoslavia (discussed in detail in Chapter 7), other countries shown in Figure 8.14 have dealt with devolutionary pressures more peacefully. Among these are Lithuania and Ukraine. Elsewhere in the world, however, ethno-cultural fragmentation has produced costly wars. For example, ethno-cultural differences were at the heart of the civil war that wracked Sri Lanka (South Asia) between the 1980s and 2009, with the Sinhalese (Buddhist) majority ultimately suppressing the drive by the Tamil (Hindu) minority for an independent state.

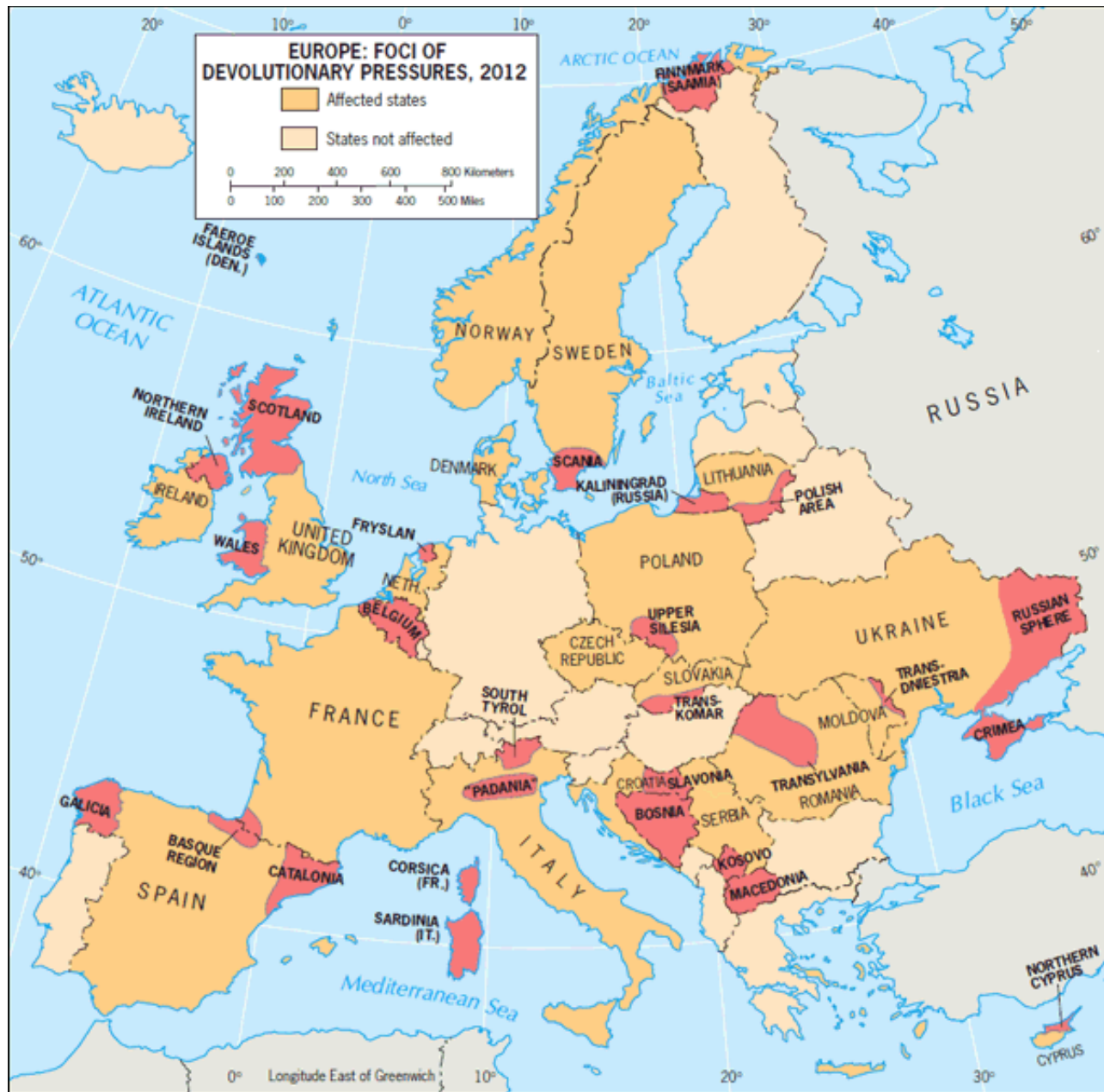


Figure 8.14 Europe: Foci of Devolutionary Pressures, 2012.

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Devolutionary forces based on ethno-cultural claims are gaining momentum in places that have long looked stable from the outside. The communist government of China has pragmatically, and arguably relatively successfully, integrated 56 ethnic nations into the state of China. China has acknowledged the precarious place of the minority nations within the larger Han-dominated state by extending rights to minorities, including the right to have two children under the government's One Child Policy. Whether the nations within China will challenge the state remains to be seen. In China's far west, Tibetan and Uyghur separatist movements have become more visible, but the Chinese government's firm hold and control of the media and Internet makes it difficult, if not impossible, for separatist groups to hold Egyptian-style protests in China.

Devolution, however, does not *necessarily* fuel greater calls for independence. Nations within states can, instead, call for autonomy within the borders of the state. In the United Kingdom, Scotland voted in 1997 to establish its own parliament, which had last met in 1707. The 129 members of the Scottish Parliament swear allegiance to the Queen of England. The Scottish Parliament has the right to introduce primary legislation over several issues, including education, health, housing, and police. Unlike the parliament in Wales that was established in 1997 and the assembly in Northern Ireland that was

established in 1998, the parliament of Scotland has the right to levy a tax of up to 3 pence per British pound.

Devolutionary pressures can create demands for new states, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, or for greater autonomy within a state, like Scotland in the United Kingdom.

Economic Devolutionary Forces

Devolutionary pressures often arise from a combination of sources. In Catalonia, ethnocultural differences play a significant role, but Catalonians also cite economics; with about 6 percent of Spain's territory and just 15 percent of its population, Catalonia produces some 25 percent of all Spanish exports by value and 40 percent of its industrial exports (Fig. 8.15). Pro-independence groups in Catalonia held a referendum in April 2011 seeking a vote for independence. The vote failed, but devolutionary forces continue to argue that Catalonia's economy pays more into the Spanish government than it receives from the state of Spain.



Figure 8.15 Barcelona, Spain.

Barcelona's long-standing economic and political significance is indelibly imprinted in the urban landscape. Once the heart of a far-flung Mediterranean empire, Barcelona went on to become a center of commerce and banking as the Iberian Peninsula industrialized. In the process, the city became a center of architectural innovation that is not just evident in the major public buildings. The major streets are lined with impressive buildings—many with intricate stone façades. © Alexander B. Murphy.

Economic forces play an even more prominent role in Italy and France. In Italy, demands for autonomy for Sardinia are deeply rooted in the island's economic circumstances, with accusations of neglect by the government in Rome high on the list of grievances. Italy also faces serious devolutionary forces on its mainland peninsula. One is rooted in regional disparities between north and south. The Mezzogiorno region lies to the south, below the Ancona Line (an imaginary border extending from Rome to the Adriatic coast at Ancona). The wealthier north stands in sharp contrast to the poorer south. Despite the large subsidies granted to the Mezzogiorno, the development gap between the north, very much a part of the European core, and the south, part of the European periphery, has been widening. Some Italian politicians have exploited widespread impatience with the situation by forming organizations to promote northern interests, including devolution. One of these organizations, the Northern League, has raised the prospect of an independent state called Padania in the northern

part of Italy centered on the Po River. After a surge of enthusiasm, the Padania campaign faltered, but it pushed the Italian government to focus more attention on regional inequalities within the country.

Brazil provides another example of the interconnections between devolutionary movements and economics. As in northern Italy, a separatist movement emerged in the 1990s in a better-off region in the south that includes the three southernmost States of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, and Parana. Southerners complained that the government was mispending their tax money on assistance to Amazonia in northern Brazil. The southerners found a leader, manufactured a flag, and demanded independence for their Republic of the Pampas. The Brazilian government responded by outlawing the separatists' political party, but the economic differences between north and south continue, and devolution pressures will certainly arise again.

Territorial Influences on Devolution

We have seen how political decisions and cultural and economic forces can generate devolutionary processes in states. Devolutionary events have at least one feature in common: they most often occur on the margins of states. Note that every one of the devolution-affected areas shown in Figure 8.14 lies on a coast or on a border. Distance, remoteness, and marginal location frequently strengthen devolutionary tendencies. The regions most likely to seek devolution are those far from the national capital. Many are separated by water, desert, or mountains from the center of power and adjoin neighbors that may support separatist objectives.

Note also that many islands are subject to devolutionary processes: Corsica (France), Sardinia (Italy), Taiwan (China), Singapore (Malaysia), Zanzibar (Tanzania), Jolo (Philippines), Puerto Rico (United States), Mayotte (Comoros), and East Timor (Indonesia) are notable examples. As this list indicates, some of these islands became independent states, while others were divided during devolution. Insularity clearly has advantages for separatist movements.

Not surprisingly, the United States faces its most serious devolutionary pressures on the islands of Hawai'i (Fig. 8.16). The year 1993 marked the hundred-year anniversary of the United States' annexation of Hawai'i. In that year, a vocal minority of native Hawai'ians and their sympathizers demanded the return of rights lost during the "occupation." These demands included the right to reestablish an independent state called Hawai'i (before its annexation Hawai'i was a Polynesian kingdom) on several of the smaller islands. Their hope is that ultimately the island of Kauai, or at least a significant part of that island, which is considered ancestral land, will become a component of the independent Hawai'ian state.

At present, the native Hawai'ian separatists do not have the numbers, resources, or influence to achieve their aims. The potential for some form of separation between Hawai'i and the mainland United States does exist, however. The political geographer Saul Cohen theorized in 1991 that political entities situated in border zones between geopolitical powers may become gateway states, absorbing and assimilating diverse cultures and traditions and emerging as new entities, no longer dominated by one or the other. Hawai'i, he suggests, is a candidate for this status.

Territorial characteristics can play a significant role in starting and sustaining devolutionary processes. Distance can be compounded by differences in physical geography—a feeling of remoteness can be fueled by being isolated in a valley or separated by mountains or a river. Basic physical-geographic and locational factors can thus be key ingredients in the devolutionary process.

Electoral Geography

The partitioning of state territory into electoral districts represents another key component of a state's internal political geography. Electoral geographers examine how the spatial configuration of electoral districts and the voting patterns that emerge in particular elections reflect and influence social and political affairs. Various countries use different voting systems to elect their governments. For example, in the 1994 South African election, government leaders introduced a system of 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 1994 election in South Africa, the leading political party, the African National Congress, designated at least 35 percent of its slate of candidates to women, helping South Africa become one of the world leaders in the percent of women who hold seats in parliament or legislature (see Fig. 5.17).

The geographic study of voting behavior is especially interesting because it helps us assess whether people's voting tendencies are influenced by their geographic situation. Maps of voting patterns often produce surprises that can be explained by other maps, and Geographic Information Systems have raised this kind of analysis to new levels. Political geographers study church affiliation, income level, ethnic background, education attainment, and numerous other social and economic factors to gain an understanding of why voters in a certain region might have voted the way they did.

Field Note

“As I drove along a main road through a Honolulu suburb I noticed that numerous houses had the Hawai'i State flag flying upside down. I knocked on the door of this house and asked the homeowner why he was treating the State flag this way. He invited me in and we talked for more than an hour. 'This is 1993,' he said, 'and we native Hawai'ians are letting the State government and the country know that we haven't forgotten the annexation by the United States of our kingdom. I don't accept it, and we want our territory to plant our flag and keep the traditions alive. Why don't you drive past the royal palace, and you'll see that we mean it.' He was right. The Iolani Palace, where the Hawai'ians' last monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, reigned until she was deposed by a group of American businessmen in 1893, was draped in black for all of Honolulu to see. Here was devolutionary stress on American soil.”



Figure 8.16 Honolulu, Hawai'i.

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The domain in which electoral geographers can have the most concrete influence is in the drawing of electoral districts. In a democracy with representatives elected by district, spatial organization of the districts determines whose voice is heard in a given place—with impacts on who is elected. A voter's most direct contact with government is at the local level. The United States Constitution establishes a system of **territorial representation**. In the Senate, each major territorial unit (State) gets two representatives, and in the House of Representatives, members are elected from territorially defined districts based on population.

The Constitution requires a census every ten years in order to enumerate the population and reapportion the representatives accordingly. **Reapportionment** is the process by which districts are moved according to population shifts, so that each

district encompasses approximately the same number of people. For example, after the 2010 census, several States in the Rust Belt, including Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan lost representatives and the Sun Belt States of Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida along with the southwestern States of Arizona, Nevada, and Utah gained representatives.

In the United States, once reapportionment is complete, individual States go through the process of redistricting, each following its own system. The criteria involved in redistricting are numerous, but the most important is equal representation, achieved by ensuring that districts have approximately the same populations. In addition, the Supreme Court prefers compact and contiguous districts that keep political units (such as counties) intact. Finally, the courts have repeatedly called for representational equality of racial and linguistic minorities.

Even after the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, minorities were refused voting rights in a multitude of districts and States around the country. County registrars would close their doors when African Americans came to register to vote, and intimidation kept many away from voting at the polls. Even in places where minorities were allowed to register and vote, the parties drawing the voting districts or choosing the electoral system would make it nearly impossible for the election of a minority to occur. For example, if a government has to draw ten districts in a State that is 60 percent white, 30 percent African American, and 10 percent Hispanic, it can easily dilute the minority voters by **splitting** them among multiple districts, ensuring that the white population holds the majority in each district.

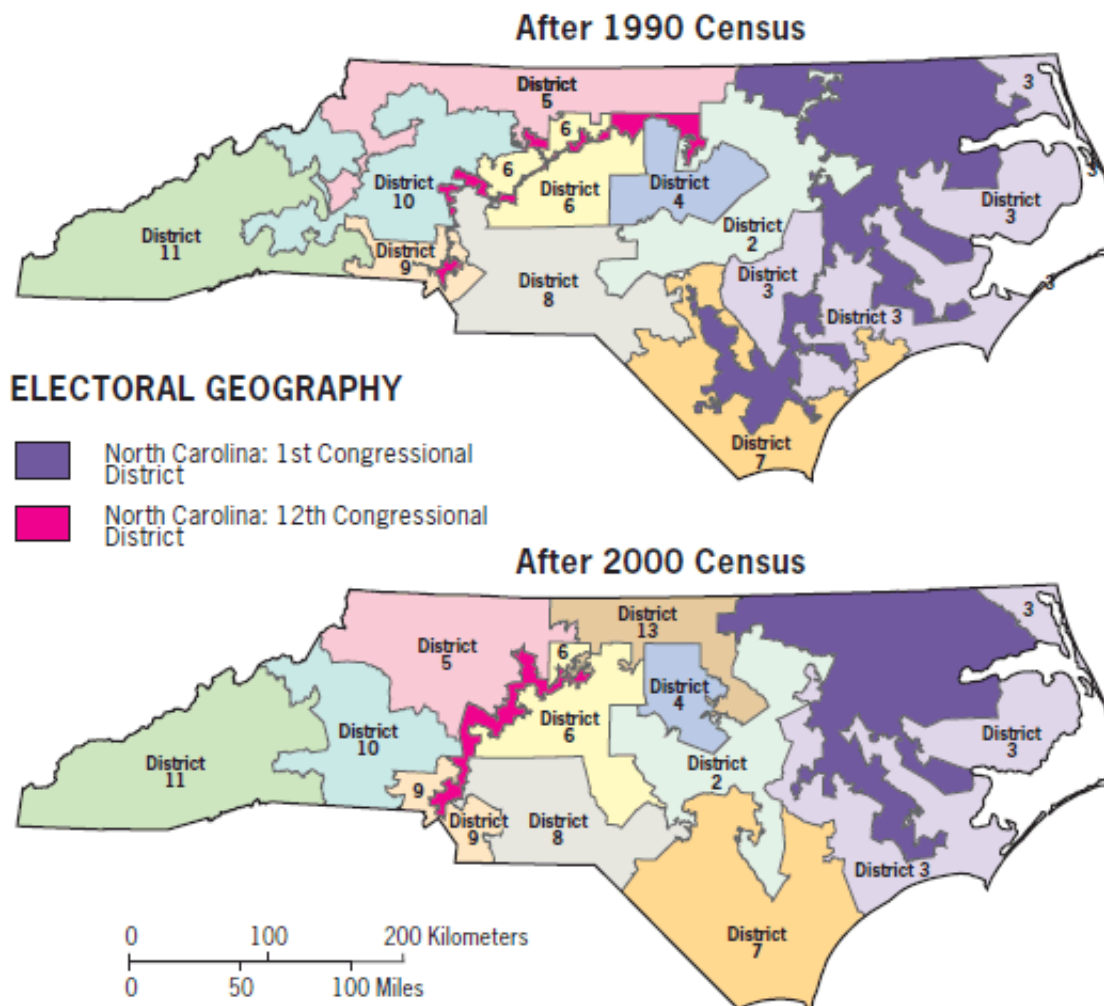


Figure 8.17 Electoral Geography.

North Carolina's congressional districts in 1992 and 2002. In 1992, North Carolina concentrated minorities into majority-minority districts. In 2002, North Carolina made its districts more compact and defended them on criteria other than race, in accordance with Supreme Court decisions during the 1990s. *Data from: United States Census, 2011.*

In 1982, the United States Congress amended the 1965 Voting Rights Act by outlawing districts that have the effect of weakening minority voting power. In a series of decisions, the courts interpreted this amendment to mean States needed to

redistrict in a way that would ensure minority representation. Using this criterion in the redistricting that followed the 1990 census, States increased the number of majority-minority districts in the House of Representatives from 27 to 52. **Majority-minority districts** are packed districts in which a majority of the population is from the minority. In the hypothetical State described above, a redistricting following this criterion could have the goal of creating at least three majority-minority districts and a fourth where minorities had a sizable enough population to influence the outcome of the election.

Ideally, majority-minority districts would be compact and contiguous and follow existing political units. Political geographers Jonathan Leib and Gerald Webster have researched the court cases that have resulted from trying to balance these often-conflicting criteria. To pack minorities who do not live compactly and contiguously, States have drawn bizarrely shaped districts, connecting minority populations with meandering corridors and following Interstates to connect urban areas that have large minority populations (Fig. 8.18).

Strange-looking districts constructed to attain certain political ends are nothing new in American politics. In 1812, Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts signed into law a district designed to give an advantage to his party—a district that looked so odd to artist Gilbert Stuart that he drew it with a head, wings, and claws. Stuart called it the “salamander district,” but a colleague immortalized it by naming it a gerrymander (after the governor). Ever since, the term **gerrymandering** has been used to describe “redistricting for advantage.” Certainly, many of the districts now on the United States electoral map may be seen as gerrymanders, but for an important purpose: to provide representation to minorities who, without it, would not be represented as effectively in the House of Representatives. Despite this well-intended goal, others argue that the packing of minorities into majority-minority districts simply concentrates minority votes, creating a countrywide government that is less responsive to minority concerns.

The larger point is that the spatial organization of voting districts is a fundamentally geographical phenomenon, and it can have profound impacts on who is represented and who is not—as well as peoples' notions of fairness. And that is only the beginning. The voting patterns that emerge from particular elections can help reinforce a sense of regionalism and can shape a government's response to issues in the future. Small wonder, then, that many individuals who have little general understanding of geography at least appreciate the importance of its electoral geography component.



Choose an example of a devolutionary movement and consider which geographic factors favor, or work against, greater autonomy (self-governance) for the region. Would granting the region autonomy strengthen or weaken the state in which the region is currently situated?