

# THE NATURE OF POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

The nature and significance of political boundary activity will serve as an introductory lesson for a unit dealing with political geography. This lesson introduces students to the extreme differences in living conditions between the United States and Mexico with respect to 15 statistical categories. Students will grasp the concept and the ramifications that an imaginary line on Earth's surface separates two countries. This activity will help students understand the nature and significance of political boundaries.

Answer the following questions to the best of your ability on a separate sheet of paper. Every answer *must* be paraphrased into your own words. You may not plagiarize or work with another individual to answer these questions.

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## **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

1. Identify different types of political boundaries.
2. Understand reasons why different types of political boundaries exist.
3. Recognize potential conflicts due to different political boundaries.
4. Explain how different shapes of states can have positive and negative impacts.
5. Examine in depth a current and/or recent boundary dispute.
6. Understand the concept of nation and state.

## **Activities:**

The boundary between the United States and Mexico represents one of the greatest divisions of wealth on Earth. Other possibilities could include North Korea/South Korea, South Africa/Botswana, or data between two political entities with extreme differences in wealth within the United States.

### **1. Study the data provided:**

<b>Category</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>Mexico</b>
Per Capita GNP	24,700	8,200
Unemployment Rate	0.07	14 to 17 percent
Arable Land	0.2	0.12
Forest and Woodland	0.29	0.24
Agricultural Employment	NA (2 percent?)	0.28
Literacy	0.96	0.9

Major Language	English	Spanish
Major Religion(s)	Protestant	89 percent Roman Catholic
Fertility Rate/women	2.05	3.25
Birth Rate	15/1,000	28/1,000
Natural Increase	0.007	0.022
Percent Urban	0.75	0.71
Pop Density/Sq.Mile	72	124
Births/1,000	15	27
Deaths/1,000	8	5
Televisions/person	1:1.2	1:6.7
Telephones/person	1:1.3	1:7.6
Radios/person	1:0.5	1:5.5
Physicians/person	1:391	1:885
Infant Mortality Rate	8/1,000	26/1,000
Hospital Beds/person	1:218	1:1,367
Percent GNP/Defense	0.055	0.005
Life Expectancy - Female	80	77
Life Expectancy - Male	73	70

Source: The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1996, Funk & Wagnalls Corporation, Mahwah, New Jersey.

## 2. Questions:

1. What is the definition of "political boundary"?
2. What purpose do political boundaries serve?
3. Do geometric political boundaries effectively separate people?
4. What impact does the United States/Mexican border have on the lives of people on either side of the boundary?

## 3. Use an atlas to find two examples for each type of political boundary listed below:

### ***Geometric Boundaries:***

- a. Straight borders running north/south
- b. Straight borders running east/west
- c. Straight borders not running east/west or north/south
- d. Borders drawn to avoid dividing islands
- e. Borders that divide lakes
- f. Detours to include settlements

**Physical Boundaries:**

- a. Mountain ranges as borders
- b. Mountain states with borders on foothills
- c. Borders to contain river sources
- d. Rivers as borders
- e. Shipping lanes as borders
- f. Sea limits extended by claiming off-shore islands
- g. Borders marked by corridor access to the sea or river
- h. List three states that claim a 200-mile off-shore boundary.

**Evaluation:**

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which one of the following borders is an example of a geometric boundary that runs east/west?
  - a. France/Spain
  - b. Egypt/Sudan
  - c. England/Scotland
  - d. North Korea/South Korea
  - e. Costa Rica/Panama
2. All of the following are examples of nations except?
  - a. Kurds
  - b. Palestinian Arabs
  - c. Israel
  - d. England
  - e. Canada
3. What type/s of political boundaries between states are most prevalent in Africa?
  - a. Geometric-Political Boundaries
  - b. Cultural-Political Boundaries
  - c. Physical-Political Boundaries
  - d. Religious Boundaries
  - e. Language Boundaries
4. Which one of the following is the best example of a nation-state?
  - a. Germany
  - b. Italy
  - c. Vietnam
  - d. Japan
  - e. England
5. How has the end of the "Cold War" influenced boundary disputes?
  - a. Boundary disputes are not as important today.
  - b. There has been a proliferation in the number of boundary disputes throughout the world.
  - c. The United States has maintained a consistent policy with regard to trying to solve boundary disputes.

- d. NATO has taken the leadership role in the world for settling conflicts.
- e. The United Nations peacekeeping force is becoming more powerful than the United States military.

Short Answer Questions: Choose two [2] of the following and answer completely.

1. Agree or disagree: Physical features make for the most logical and long-lasting type of political boundary. (i.e. mountain ranges, rivers, lakes)

Give examples of how the physical features listed in the parentheses have stabilized the border between two states, or give examples of how these physical features help create conflict.

2. Explain why many African states will suffer for generations with the decisions that were made at the Berlin conference in 1885.

Made unity and cooperation more difficult  
Slowed economic development  
Increased conflict

Support the above with specific examples and incorporate various types of political boundaries.

3. Discuss the differences between the formation of states in South America and South Asia. Give a historical/geographic perspective on how these two areas of the world developed states differently. Use geographic concepts and cite specific geographic models and theories.

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Some information adapted from Human Geography: Culture, Society, and Space Student Companion; H.J. de Blij and Alexander Murphy; John Wiley and Sons, Inc.; New York, 1999