

The Berlin Conference, held in 1884–1885, began the process of formalizing modern political boundaries in Africa. Representatives from the leading European powers, as well as the United States and Russia, met to discuss the partitioning of the African continent. Not a single African was present at the conference. In a boardroom in Berlin, Europeans made decisions about their control of territory in Africa almost as if they were playing a game of Monopoly in which the object was to control the most (and most valuable) land.

Boundaries separating British, French, Belgian, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and German spheres of influence in Africa were superimposed. That is, they were often drawn as straight lines with little awareness of or concern for the different ethnic groups living there. In East Africa, for example, the Somali people lived in lands that were partitioned between the British, French, and Italians. In numerous other instances tens and sometimes hundreds of different ethnic groups were combined in a single colony.

Each of the European powers administered its colonies in different ways, but a guiding philosophy of managing colonies was rooted in the racist belief that Africans were inferior. Sometimes colonial administrators used ethnic differences to create animosities between certain Africans. In Rwanda, for example, the Germans and later the Belgians exploited differences between Tutsis and Hutus. The Belgians showed favoritism to the Tutsis, however, allowing some of the men to attend school and rewarding them with jobs handling the

day-to-day affairs of the colony. In 1962, following a Hutu rebellion, the Belgians granted independence to Rwanda, which came into existence as a multinational state with a population that was seriously divided (**Figure 7.4**).

Before and after World War II there was a surge in efforts by Africans and other colonized peoples to attain independence and achieve **self-determination**, the ability to choose their own political status. Globally, colonialism fell out of favor. On the continent of Africa, for example, some 32 former colonies gained their independence between 1960 and 1970. Even though European colonialism was waning, the framework for the political organization of space that exists today was cemented because the newly independent countries often retained their colonial boundaries.

#### CONCEPT CHECK



1. **How** did the concept of sovereignty change after the Peace of Westphalia, and why is this significant?
2. **What** are the four criteria that define a state, and how is a state different from a nation?
3. **How** did colonialism affect the political map of Africa?

## Geographical Characteristics of States

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

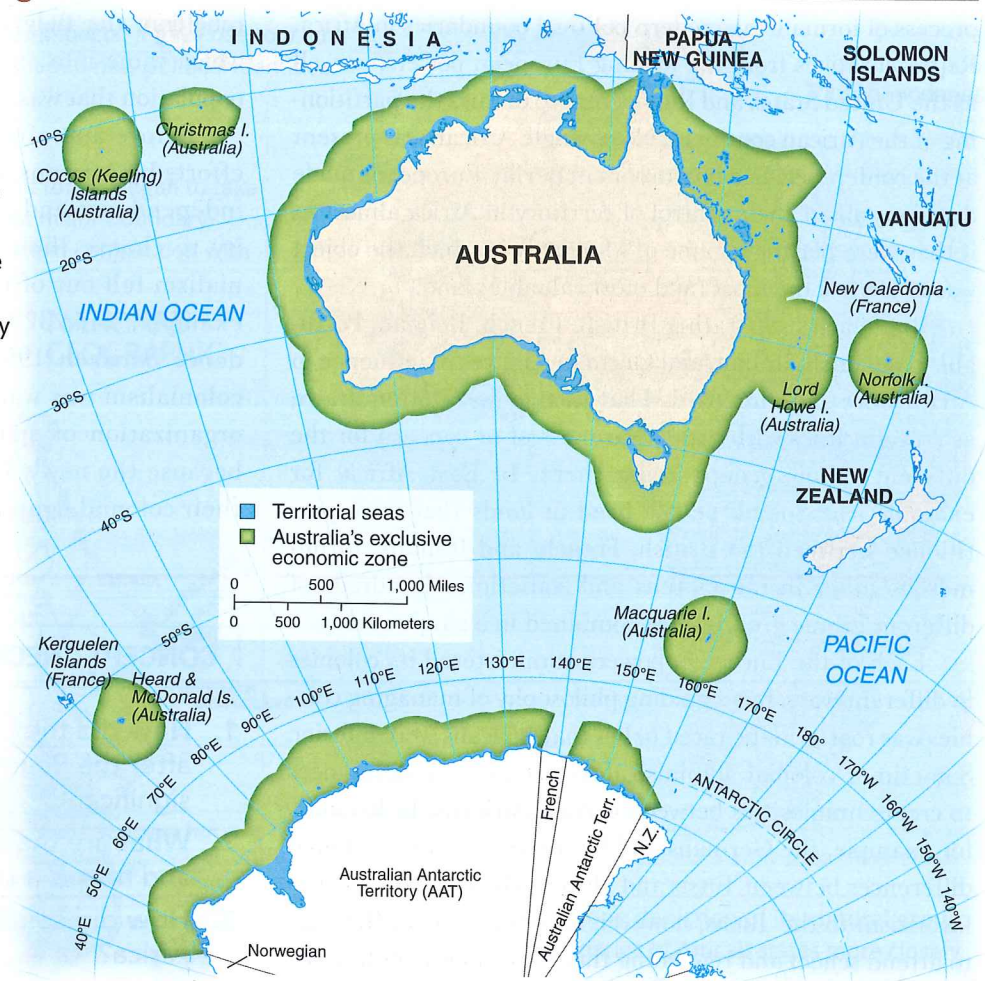
1. **Explain** how boundaries affect access to resources.
2. **Compare** and contrast centripetal and centrifugal forces.
3. **Identify** two systems of internal spatial organization.
4. **Define** devolution.

**E**arlier, in our discussion of Africa, we touched on boundaries and the role they played in transforming the political spaces of the African continent. Boundaries are regulatory devices that not only sanction territorial possession, but also help identify the contents—the people, natural resources,

and territory—of states. In this section, we first examine different types of boundaries, visualizing the ways boundaries simultaneously secure, divide, and configure political space. Then, in subsequent sections, we consider other forces that affect the spatial functioning of states such as pressures of political integration or belonging, and political separation.

## Exclusive economic zones • Figure 7.5

EEZs extend up to 200 nautical miles from shore, as shown for Australia. Coastal and island states have a reduced form of sovereignty—the “sovereign right”—to manage the resources in the waters and on the ocean floor in that area within their exclusive economic zones. This contrasts with their territorial seas, where they have full sovereignty. Note that Australia is one of several countries that assert sovereignty over part of Antarctica.



## Boundaries

Every state consists of a defined territory marked by at least one **boundary**. We tend to think of boundaries as lines that stretch horizontally through space—the way we see them on maps—but boundaries are better understood as having a vertical

### boundary

A vertical plane, usually represented as a line on a map, that fixes the territory of a state.

extent, dividing the airspace above the ground and the rocks and resources below ground. The boundaries of coastal states extend offshore. The waters enclosed by these boundaries are considered part of the territory of the state and are called **territorial seas**. By international convention, territorial seas rarely exceed 19 km (12 mi). Over the past several decades, desire for rights to marine resources has led to the development of *exclusive economic zones* (EEZs) for coastal and island states (Figure 7.5).

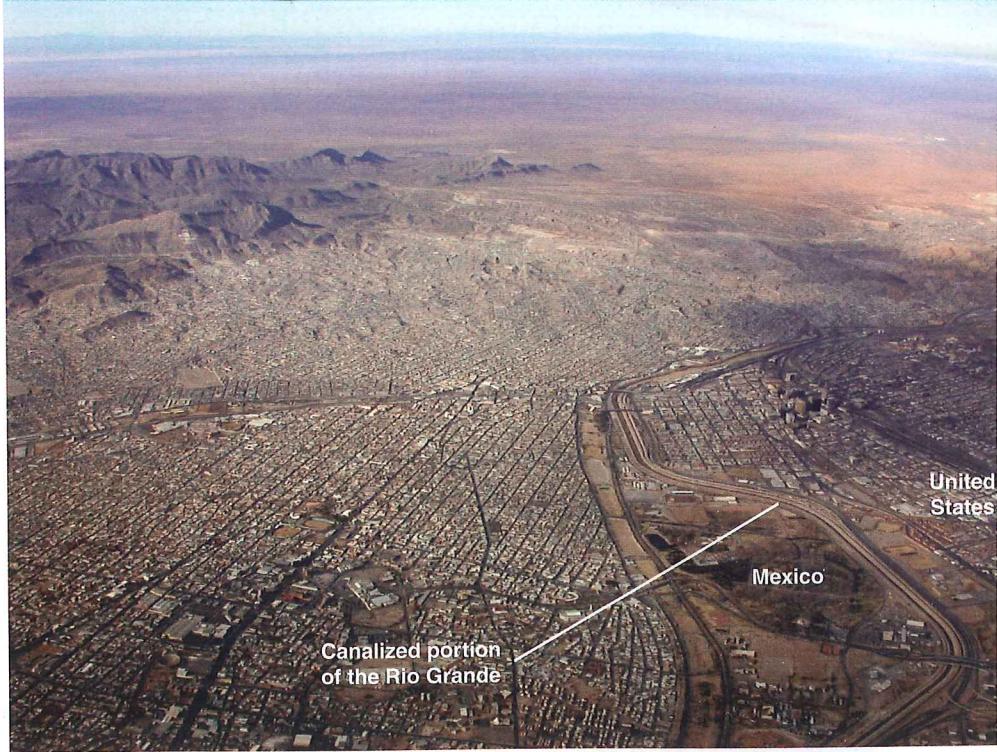
By convention, boundaries are defined in legal documents, are drawn or delimited on maps, and may also be demarcated on the ground with signs, posts, fences, or other

markers. Not all boundaries are marked or demarcated on the ground. A boundary might not be demarcated because it is disputed. This is the case with portions of the boundary between India and China. Sometimes even boundaries that are not disputed are not demarcated as, for example, in lightly populated areas, such as the high-altitude zones along the Andes Mountains between Chile and Argentina.

All political boundaries are human creations, but they often make use of physical features. A *physiographic boundary* follows a natural feature, such as a river or mountain range. For example, the boundary between Bulgaria and Romania follows the Danube River for much of its length. In mountainous areas, physiographic boundaries usually follow the crest, the line connecting the highest points. When a river is used, the boundary may be placed along one bank, in the middle of the river, or along the deepest part of the river channel. One problem with using rivers as boundaries is the potential for a river to substantially shift its course (Figure 7.6).

## Fixing a boundary • Figure 7.6

We expect boundaries to be fixed or stable, but rivers are dynamic. This variability was a long-standing problem between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, where the Rio Grande (called the Rio Bravo in Mexico) separates the two countries. The issue was finally resolved in the 1960s when a portion of the river was canalized—forced to flow in a concrete-lined channel in order to keep it from changing course and causing people to find themselves on a different side of a political boundary.



*Geometric boundaries* are drawn as straight lines and sometimes follow lines of latitude or longitude. As we have discussed, the concentration of geometric boundaries in Africa stems from the Berlin Conference. West of the Great Lakes, the boundary between the United States and Canada follows the 49th parallel, and the straight line between Alaska and the Yukon Territory follows the 141st meridian.

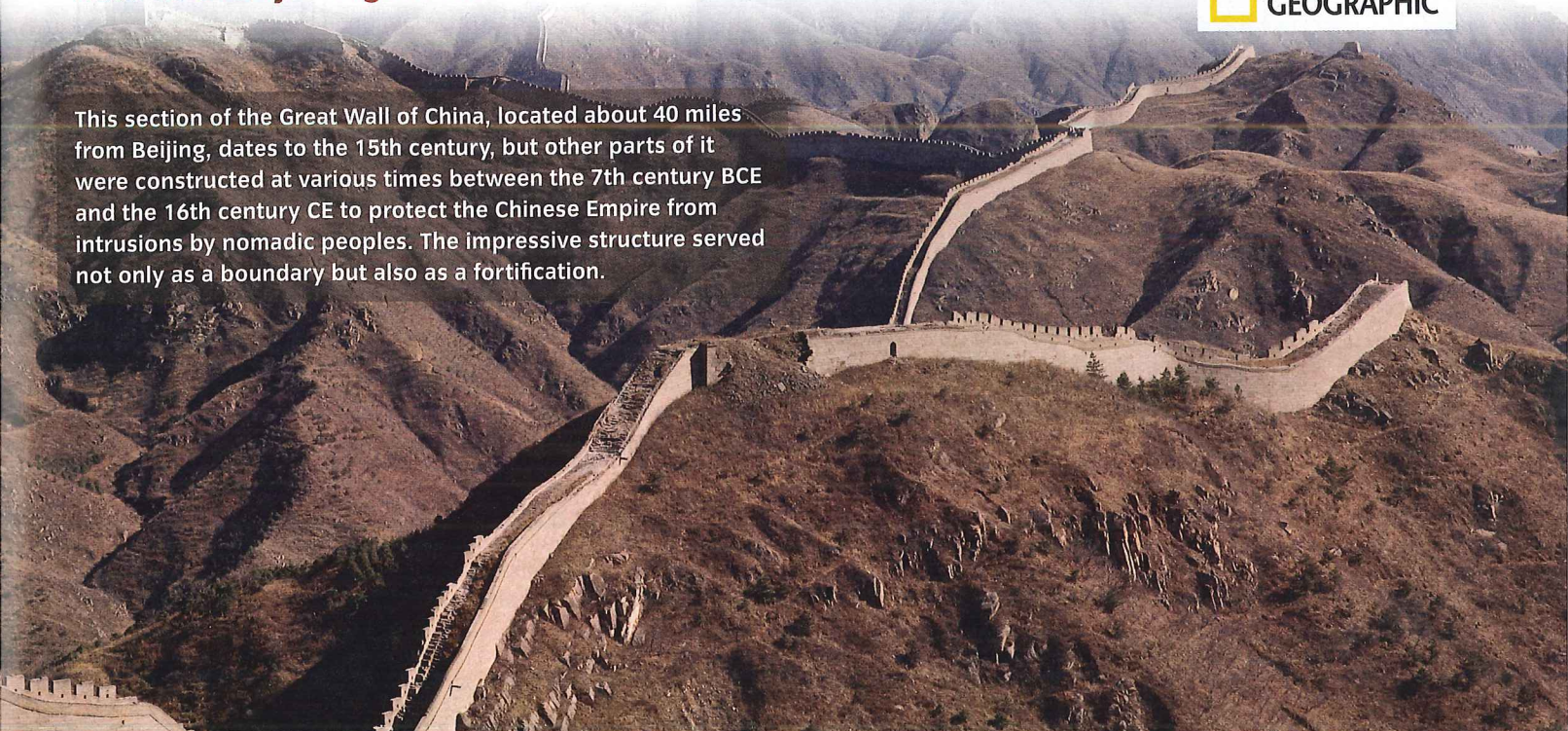
*Ethnographic boundaries* may be based on one or more cultural traits such as religion, language, or ethnicity. In South Asia, the boundary drawn between India and

Pakistan was conceived as an ethnographic boundary separating Hindus from Muslims. Linguistic boundaries are common in Europe. For example, the boundary between Spain and Portugal is linguistic, as is the boundary separating Bulgaria from Greece.

A *relic boundary* is one that used to exist but is no longer recognized as an official boundary and, therefore, is no longer formally defined or delimited. Relic boundaries result from changes in the ways that geographic space is administered over time. Perhaps the most familiar example is the Great Wall of China (**Figure 7.7**)

## Relic boundary • Figure 7.7

This section of the Great Wall of China, located about 40 miles from Beijing, dates to the 15th century, but other parts of it were constructed at various times between the 7th century BCE and the 16th century CE to protect the Chinese Empire from intrusions by nomadic peoples. The impressive structure served not only as a boundary but also as a fortification.



# WHAT A GEOGRAPHER SEES

## The Making of a Boundary on Hispaniola

Politically, the Caribbean island of Hispaniola is occupied by two states: the Dominican Republic on the east and Haiti on the west. Spain asserted a claim to the island following the voyages of Christopher Columbus, but the island later came under French control. Although Haiti and the Dominican Republic achieved independence, respectively, in 1804 and 1844, disputes developed over the location of the boundary.



a. This map shows the present location of the international boundary, which dates from a 1929 agreement negotiated between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Prior to this agreement, however, the location of the boundary was a source of contention.



b. At the turn of the 20th century, the Dominican Republic recognized a very different boundary. When the Dominican Republic issued this stamp in 1900, it provoked a political crisis. As you can see, the Dominican Republic had pushed the boundary significantly to the west and claimed possession of about three-fourths of the island, much to the consternation of the Haitian government as well as Haitians living in the disputed area. The Dominican Republic eventually relinquished its claims, paving the way for the 1929 treaty.



c. Can you spot the international boundary in this satellite image?



### Think Critically

1. What might cause such a striking difference between the two countries, as shown in image c?
2. How is the boundary an ethnographic boundary?

Many boundaries have complex origins and in reality often reflect a consideration of multiple factors, including competing political concerns (see *What a Geographer Sees*).

## Territorial Extent and Configuration

States come in a variety of shapes and sizes (refer again to Figure 7.1). The smallest state in the world, Vatican City,

**The 10 largest states in the world Table 7.1**

State	Land Area (sq km)	Area (sq mi)
Russian Federation	17,098,242	6,601,665
China	9,984,670	3,855,101
United States	9,826,675	3,794,099
Canada	9,596,961	3,705,406
Brazil	8,514,877	3,287,611
Australia	7,741,220	2,988,901
India	3,287,263	1,269,219
Argentina	2,780,400	1,073,518
Kazakhstan	2,724,900	1,052,089
Sudan	2,505,813	967,499

(Source: Data from CIA, 2009.)



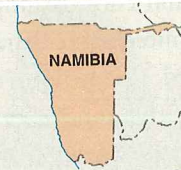


covers just 44 hectares (109 acres) within the city of Rome. It is a *microstate*, a political state that is extremely small in total land area. At the opposite extreme, Russia is the largest state in the world, more than one and a half times the size of the United States (see **Table 7.1**). Antarctica is the only landmass that is not part of any state, though some countries have claims to parts of it (refer again to Figure 7.5).

On the basis of their shape, states can be classified as compact, elongated, prorupt, fragmented, or perforated. **Figure 7.8** illustrates these shapes.

A rupture in the territory of a state may result in the creation of an **enclave** or an **exclave**. Vatican City is not only a microstate, it is also an enclave state because it is completely surrounded by territory belonging to Italy. As shown in Figure 7.8, Lesotho perforates the territory of South Africa, making Lesotho an enclave state. Look again at Figure 7.8. Is Swaziland also an enclave state? Strictly speaking, the answer

**Shapes of states • Figure 7.8**

Geographers recognize five basic shapes of states, but sometimes a state exhibits characteristics of more than one of these shapes. Note, for example, that Chile is both elongated and fragmented, and that South Africa has two perforations and is prorupt. For political geographers, awareness of the configuration of a state's territory, the nature of its topography, the characteristics of its boundaries, and its relations with its neighbors are just some factors that affect the security of a state.

Shape	Territorial Configuration	Selected Examples (with simple outline maps)
Compact	Somewhat circular	
Elongated	Long and often narrow	
Prorupt	Includes a projection or panhandle	
Fragmented	Divided into two or more parts	
Perforated	Interrupted or penetrated by an intervening state or states	

is no since Swaziland shares a border with the states of South Africa and Mozambique and is not completely surrounded by another state. For this reason, Swaziland constitutes a kind of semi-enclave with respect to South Africa.

In North America, the territory of Canada intervenes to make Alaska an exclave of the United States. In southern Spain, the narrow peninsula of Gibraltar (the location of the picturesque Rock of Gibraltar) is a self-governing British territory. Because Gibraltar is a peninsula and is not surrounded by Spanish territory, it constitutes a semi-enclave with respect to Spain and an exclave with respect to the United Kingdom. As a general rule, all perforated states have enclaves or semi-enclaves, but not all fragmented states have exclaves. Can you explain why?

For administrative purposes, states are divided internally into territorial subdivisions that are variously called regions, provinces, districts, states, or cantons. How the central government interacts with its territorial subdivisions varies from country to country. Globally, two systems of government have emerged: the federal and the unitary systems. A state organized according to the *federal system* distributes some power to its territorial subdivisions so that they have the authority to develop and implement their own laws and policies. This authority is granted by and detailed in the constitution of the state. Therefore, in a federal system the constitution guarantees a decentralization of governmental authority.

In contrast, the *unitary system* concentrates power in the central government instead of distributing some of it among its territorial subdivisions. Decision making and policy development are therefore more centralized in a unitary state. China is a unitary state, as are Pakistan, Turkey, Ghana, Kenya, and Peru. Examples of federal states include Australia, the United States, Brazil, India, Mexico, and Russia. While it existed, the Soviet Union was also a federal state. However, under the control of the Communist Party decision making in the Soviet Union was highly centralized. As we have seen, when the Soviet Union fractured apart, some lines that had previously served as internal, administrative boundaries within the Soviet Union suddenly became international boundaries. See *Video Explorations* to understand some of the other consequences of this political change.

## Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

Whether unitary or federal, all states must deal with forces that can affect their unity. Political geographers distinguish between two kinds of such forces: centripetal and centrifugal.

## Video Explorations

### Estonia—Identity, Religion, and Politics



The video introduces the Setu people of southeastern Estonia and explores the impact of political change on them and their local landscapes.

The events on 9/11 are considered a **centripetal force** for the United States because they contributed to a collective sense of being under attack and to a shared sense of grief. The cultural diversity of some states, where different groups struggle for access to resources, can be a **centrifugal force**, especially if one group feels that it is not treated equally. In addition to cultural diversity, economic disparities within a country's population can have a centrifugal effect. Similarly, a serious economic downturn can erode people's support for the government. Government policies that exclude one or more groups of people or diminish their political voice, can contribute to rebellions or insurgencies.

#### centripetal force

An event or a circumstance that helps bind together the social and political fabric of a state.

#### centrifugal force

An event or a circumstance that weakens a state's social and political fabric.

Centripetal forces include certain policies and practices of governmental and nongovernmental institutions. Schools as well as the armed forces inculcate patriotism and build support for a state. Even international athletic competitions can unite a country's people.

Writing in 1940 when World War II was underway, the political geographer Richard Hartshorne drew attention to the importance of centripetal forces and specifically the value of the *raison d'être*, or reason for being.

A *raison d'être* is the idea, belief, or purpose that justifies the existence of a state. It is also the most significant centripetal force. The *raison d'être* for Pakistan was to create a Muslim-majority state in South Asia. The *raison d'être* for Israel was to create a homeland for the Jews. The absence of a *raison d'être* can be equally detrimental for the cohesiveness of a state. Yugoslavia was created as a multinational state whose citizens were separated by linguistic and religious differences and who did not share a *raison d'être*. The dictatorial rule of President Tito (from 1953 to 1980) held its diverse peoples together. After Tito's death, the country broke apart largely along ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines.

Whether a specific event is a centripetal or centrifugal force depends on one's perspective and may even change over time. For example, the 1989 reunification of Germany was widely perceived as a powerful centripetal force when it happened. However, the challenges of bridging the social divide between East and West Germans and the financial burden of reunification have, for

a number of citizens, contributed to a greater awareness of the centrifugal forces associated with reunification.

It is impossible to list all of the kinds of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Depending on the situation, religion might be a centripetal force in one instance but highly divisive in another instance. The same can be said for issues involving language, immigration, election results, and national identity (**Figure 7.9**).

## Separatism and Devolution

States change over time, and so do the centripetal and centrifugal forces that affect them. The stability of a state depends on how effectively it manages these forces. Even very stable states continually face challenges to their unity. **Separatism**, the desire of a nation to break apart from its state, is one of these challenges. A nation's sense of identity and the perception that it is different from other groups in the state can contribute to separatist sentiment. Separatism is closely connected with calls for greater *autonomy*, or self-government. When a state transfers some power a self-identified community within it, the process is called **devolution**. Devolution is one mechanism that states use to help accommodate separatist pressures.

### Centrifugal and centripetal forces in Serbia • Figure 7.9

Kosovo is a region in the country of Serbia. The population of Kosovo consists of an Albanian majority and a Serb minority. Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008 has had both centrifugal and centripetal consequences: centrifugal in that it has challenged the unity of the Serbian state, but centripetal in that it has renewed Serb attachment to the region.

a. With a sign proclaiming "Kosovo is Serbia," protestors march in opposition to Kosovo's declaration of independence.



b. A Kosovar Albanian teacher shows her class the new Kosovo flag.



From the late 1930s until 1975, Spain was ruled by the dictator Francisco Franco. His idea of nationalism followed the idea of the nation-state strictly. He banned the use of the Euskera and Catalan languages and forbade the use of national symbols such as the Basque and Catalan flags. Franco's treatment of both groups fortified their national identity. It also contributed to the formation of Euskadi Ta Azkatasuna, or ETA, a Basque group that has often resorted to terrorism. How has Spain integrated these nations since?

a. Spain ratified a new constitution in 1978 that recognized the unity of the Spanish nation but also guaranteed autonomy to the "nationalities and regions integrated in it." This has been called the "café para todos" (*coffee for all*) model. The constitution fashioned the autonomous communities system and paved the way for the creation of the country's 17 autonomous regions (see map). As autonomous regions, the Basque Country and Catalonia control their own police forces, education, health care, and other services.



b. Basque separatists at a rally carrying a banner with a map of the Basque region. Note that there is a Basque population in southwestern France and that part of France is included in the territory referred to as "Greater Basque Country." In 2008, the Basque government advanced a proposal for Basque self-determination—a sign that some Basques desire separation from Spain. The proposal was overturned by the Spanish government.

c. Catalans march in support of the Catalan Charter. They carry Catalan flags, and their placards read "som una nació" (*we are a nation*). Approved in 2006, the Charter devolves still more power to Catalonia in areas of immigration, taxation, and transportation. Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions in Spain and has often used the economic importance of the region as a bargaining chip to gain additional autonomy.



Spain is a multinational state (population 47 million) that has confronted separatist movements led by two of its nations: the Basques (population about 2.2 million), and the Catalans (population about 7.4 million). The national identity of the Basques stems in part from their language, called Euskera, and a shared history as a self-governing people. Catalan nationalism derives from similar factors, including the Catalan language and a tradition of autonomy. See **Figure 7.10** to learn more about these movements and how Spain has dealt with them.

### CONCEPT CHECK



1. **What** is meant by the vertical extent of a boundary, and why is it significant?
2. **How** might a state's shape contribute to centrifugal or centripetal forces?
3. **What** are the main differences between unitary and federal systems of government?
4. **How** have devolution and multinationalism shaped Spain's political geography?