The Shapes of Political Boundaries

Political boundaries are the dividing lines between countries, states, provinces, counties, and cities. These lines, more often called borders, are created by people to separate areas governed by different groups. Sometimes, political boundaries follow physical boundaries, but most of the time you can’t see them. Most maps show political boundaries.

Political boundaries change over time through wars, treaties, and trade. After World War II, the map of Europe was almost completely redrawn. Germany’s eastern border was moved farther west, and the country itself was later divided into East and West Germany. Most of Africa’s boundaries were formed during the colonial period, drawn by the ruling nations of Britain, France, etc. Those nations never considered Africa’s tribal boundaries or cultural values when drawing these lines, causing a lot of the political problems and conflicts that occur today.

In 1803, the United States bought 2,147,000 square kilometers (828,800 square miles) of land in a treaty with France. This land, the Louisiana Purchase, expanded the size of the U.S. to include the areas that are now Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and parts of Minnesota, North and South Dakota, New Mexico, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Louisiana. The western boundary of the U.S. moved from the Mississippi River to what is now Yellowstone National Park.

An important type of political boundary in the United States is the boundary of a congressional district. A congressional district is an area that elects a representative to the U.S. House of Representatives. After the U.S. Census, which is taken every 10 years, the population of a state may grow or shrink enough to gain or lose a representative in the House. When this happens, congressional district lines are redrawn in a complicated and controversial process called redistricting. The boundaries between congressional districts may unite or divide economic, social, or ethnic neighborhoods.
San Antonio Political Divisions

The map above demonstrates the shape of San Antonio as it appears today. The different colors inside of San Antonio represent cities as well including places such as Balconies Heights and Leon Valley which were incorporated as cities before San Antonio grew to its present size.

Also included in this map are areas owned by the national government including Fort Sam Houston which are not directly controlled by the city of San Antonio.

Reflection:

What do notice about the shape of San Antonio?

Why do you think San Antonio has different “branches” on the outside of the city?
## Political Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>Bexar County</td>
<td>Texas</td>
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