



THE GEOPOLITICS OF NORTH AMERICA

Power, Trade, and People — The Continent's Defining Relationships

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____



The North American continent viewed from orbit — geography, borders, and political relationships define the strategic interests of its three sovereign nations

PART 1 — Key Vocabulary

Study these words carefully. They appear throughout the reading passages and exercises below.

Term	Definition
<i>geopolitics</i>	the study of how geographical features — including location, shared borders, natural resources, and strategic terrain — determine the political relationships and long-term strategic interests of states
<i>sovereignty</i>	the full, independent, and supreme authority that a state exercises over its own territory and population, free from external control, interference, or coercion by any outside power
<i>hegemony</i>	the political, economic, or cultural dominance exercised by one powerful state over a group of neighbouring or weaker states, often without direct military force
<i>bilateral</i>	involving, or formally agreed upon by, exactly two nations or parties — typically applied to treaties, trade agreements, diplomatic relations, or security arrangements
<i>multilateral</i>	involving three or more nations or parties simultaneously, as in an international treaty, regional alliance, or trade agreement — distinguished from bilateral arrangements by its broader scope
<i>tariff</i>	a tax imposed by a government on goods imported from — or, less commonly, exported to — another country; used to raise government

revenue, protect domestic industries from foreign competition, or as a tool of diplomatic leverage

USMCA

the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement; the free-trade treaty signed in 2018 and ratified in 2020 that replaced NAFTA, updating provisions on digital trade, intellectual property, labour standards, and dairy market access

remittances

the sums of money regularly transferred by immigrant workers to family members or dependants in their country of origin — a significant and often indispensable source of household income and national foreign currency in many developing economies

diaspora

a community of people who have been dispersed from their original homeland and settled permanently or semi-permanently in foreign countries, while retaining cultural, linguistic, or emotional ties to their place of origin

sanctions

punitive measures — typically trade restrictions, asset freezes, travel bans, or financial penalties — imposed by one or more countries on another state in order to pressure its government into changing specific policies or behaviours

Monroe Doctrine

the foreign-policy principle articulated by US President James Monroe in 1823, asserting that the Western Hemisphere was closed to further European colonisation and that any attempt by a European power to extend its political influence in the Americas would be treated as a direct threat to US security

extraterritorial

having legal force, jurisdiction, or practical effect beyond the borders of the country that enacted a particular law or policy — for example, when a government prosecutes crimes committed on foreign soil, or when domestic regulations effectively govern the behaviour of foreign firms

PART 2 — Vocabulary Practice

Match each term on the left to its correct definition on the right.

1. geopolitics
2. sovereignty
3. hegemony
4. USMCA
5. remittances
6. sanctions
7. diaspora

- A. money transferred by immigrant workers to family members in their home country
- B. the study of how geographical features shape the strategic interests of states
- C. dominance of one powerful state over weaker neighbours, often without direct military force
- D. the 2018 free-trade treaty replacing NAFTA, governing commerce among the three North American nations
- E. punitive trade restrictions or asset freezes imposed to pressure another government into changing its policies
- F. the supreme authority a state exercises over its own territory, free from external control
- G. a community dispersed from its homeland but retaining cultural or emotional ties to its place of origin

Fill in the blank with the correct vocabulary word.

1. When the United States imposed steep _____ on imported Canadian steel and aluminium, Canada responded immediately by placing equivalent trade penalties on a range of American consumer goods.
2. Mexico's economy depends heavily on _____ from workers in the United States — transfers that represent the country's single largest source of foreign currency, surpassing even oil revenues.
3. The _____, articulated in 1823, established the foundational principle that the Western Hemisphere fell within the exclusive sphere of American strategic interest and was closed to European interference.
4. Canada and the United States maintain one of the most successful _____ relationships in the world — a partnership defined by the world's longest undefended border and nearly \$2 trillion in annual cross-border trade.
5. The _____, which entered into force in July 2020, introduced new provisions on digital commerce and labour standards that NAFTA, negotiated in the early 1990s, had never addressed.
6. The Mexican-American _____ is one of the largest in the world — with more than 36 million people of Mexican origin living in the United States, it constitutes a powerful political and cultural force in both countries simultaneously.



The United States Capitol — for two centuries, Washington's political decisions have shaped the economic and security landscape of the entire North American continent

PART 3 — Reading Passage 1: Power, Trade, and the Architecture of North American Geopolitics

The Geographical Foundation

North America's geopolitical structure is, at its most fundamental level, a product of geography. The United States occupies the heart of the continent — bordered to the north by Canada, the world's second-largest country by land area, and to the south by Mexico, a nation of 130 million people sharing a nearly 2,000-mile frontier with its northern neighbour. The continent's three sovereign states are bound together by proximity, shared river systems, common mountain ranges, and an economic interdependence so deep that the actions of any one government inevitably ripple across the others. Geography is not merely a backdrop to North American politics — it is a permanent structural force shaping every bilateral and multilateral relationship the continent has ever produced.

The Monroe Doctrine and the Logic of Hegemony

The defining framework of North American geopolitics was not a trade agreement or a military alliance — it was a declaration. In December 1823, US President James Monroe delivered a message to Congress that would bear his name for the next two centuries. The Monroe Doctrine asserted that the Western Hemisphere was no longer open to European colonisation, and that any attempt by a European power to extend its political system or territorial influence into the Americas would be regarded as a direct threat to United States security. The doctrine was, in practical terms, a declaration of hemispheric hegemony — an assertion that the United States reserved the right to define the political conditions under which the entire Western Hemisphere would operate.

The Monroe Doctrine was initially received with scepticism by European powers, who correctly noted that the United States lacked the military capacity to enforce it. But as American industrial and naval power grew through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the doctrine became an increasingly credible statement of intent. By the time of President Theodore Roosevelt's 1904 corollary — which added the assertion that the US had the right to intervene in Latin American nations to stabilise their economies and governments — hemispheric hegemony had become the operating reality of the Western Hemisphere rather than merely an aspiration.

NAFTA, USMCA, and the Codification of Interdependence

If the Monroe Doctrine defined the political architecture of the hemisphere, the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 defined its economic architecture. NAFTA eliminated the vast majority of tariffs on goods traded among the United States, Canada, and Mexico over a fifteen-year phased transition, and created the world's largest free-trade area by geographic coverage at the time of its signing. The result was a dramatic restructuring of the North American economy: manufacturing supply chains became deeply integrated across all three countries, agricultural trade expanded enormously, and the movement of capital across borders was liberalised to a degree previously unimaginable.

The USMCA — negotiated during the Trump administration and ratified in 2020 — replaced NAFTA while preserving its essential free-trade framework. The new agreement introduced updated provisions on digital trade and e-commerce, tightened rules of origin for the automotive industry, improved protections for intellectual property, and established enforceable labour standards designed to raise wages in Mexico and reduce the competitive advantage that lower Mexican labour costs provided to multinational manufacturers. The USMCA is a fundamentally multilateral instrument — its provisions bind all three governments simultaneously, and no party may unilaterally renegotiate terms with one partner without the agreement of the third.

The Canada-US Relationship: Asymmetry and Partnership

The bilateral relationship between Canada and the United States is among the most complex and consequential in the world — and one of the most frequently misunderstood. It is, at its core, asymmetric: the United States is approximately nine times larger than Canada by population and produces an economy approximately twelve times the size of Canada's. Canada sends roughly three-quarters of its exports to the United States; the United States sends only about seventeen percent of its exports to Canada. This asymmetry means that economic disruption in the United States affects Canada far more severely than the reverse — a reality that has shaped Canadian foreign policy for generations and produced what historians have called a "special relationship" defined as much by managed dependency as by genuine equality of partnership.

Comprehension Questions — Passage 1

1. In your own words, explain what the Monroe Doctrine was and why it was significant for the Western Hemisphere.

2. What does the passage mean when it says geography is "not merely a backdrop" to North American politics?

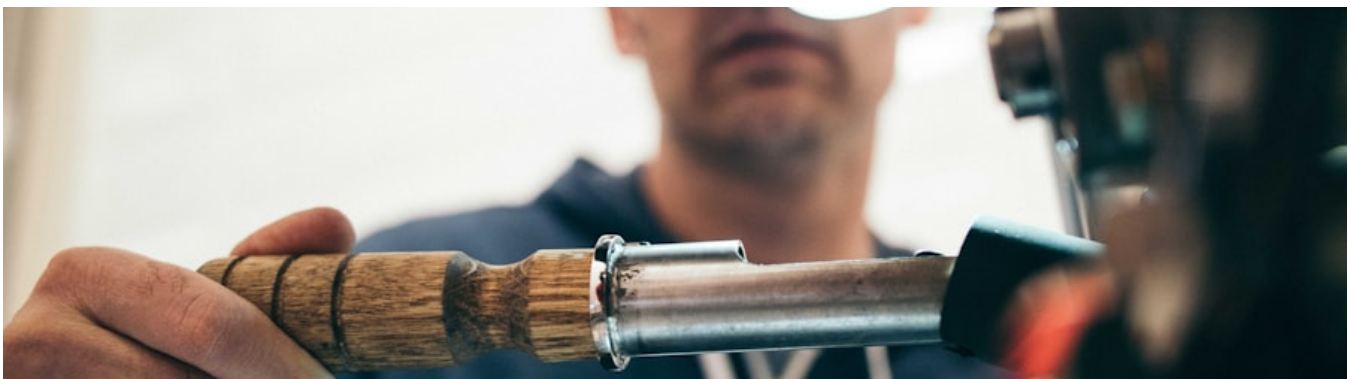
3. How did Roosevelt's 1904 corollary extend the original Monroe Doctrine?

4. What were the main economic effects of NAFTA described in the passage?

5. In what specific ways does the USMCA differ from NAFTA, according to the passage?

6. Why does the passage describe the US-Canada relationship as "asymmetric"? Use specific figures from the text to support your answer.

PART 4 — Reading Passage 2: Migration, Borders, and the Human Dimensions of Geopolitics



A busy international border crossing — the US-Mexico border is the most frequently crossed international boundary in the world, processing over 350 million legal crossings annually

The Scale of Movement

The United States-Mexico border is the most frequently crossed international boundary in the world. More than 350 million legal crossings occur each year across its approximately fifty official ports of entry — a figure that reflects the depth of economic and human integration between the two countries. The flow of people across this border has shaped both nations profoundly: the United States has absorbed one of the largest immigrant populations in its history, while Mexico has become structurally dependent on the wages its citizens earn abroad. This movement of people is not merely a humanitarian or administrative challenge — it is a geopolitical force with measurable consequences for the sovereignty, economics, and domestic politics of both states.

Remittances and the Economics of Migration

In 2023, remittances from Mexican workers in the United States reached a record \$63.3 billion — surpassing oil revenues to become Mexico's single largest source of foreign currency for the first time in its modern history. This figure is not merely an economic statistic; it represents a structural dependency that profoundly shapes Mexico's relationship with the United States and limits the Mexican government's diplomatic room for manoeuvre. A Mexican president who antagonises Washington too aggressively risks triggering extraterritorial policy responses — changes in US immigration enforcement

or remittance-transfer regulations — that would inflict immediate economic pain on millions of Mexican households. Remittances, in this sense, function as an invisible constraint on Mexican sovereignty.

The significance of remittances is not confined to Mexico. Across Central America, the economies of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador receive remittance flows representing between fifteen and twenty-five percent of their total GDP — figures that dwarf foreign-aid receipts and make Washington's policy decisions directly consequential to the daily economic lives of tens of millions of people who have no vote in American elections and no formal voice in bilateral negotiations.

Border Security and the Politics of Sovereignty

The physical border between the United States and Mexico has become one of the most politically contested spaces in the Western Hemisphere. American administrations across both parties have invested billions of dollars in surveillance technology, physical barriers, and enforcement personnel since the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. Yet the fundamental tension between economic integration — which creates structural incentives for labour migration — and political sovereignty — which demands the state's right to control who enters its territory — has never been resolved. It has merely been managed, expensively and imperfectly, across successive administrations.

The exercise of extraterritorial authority has become an increasingly prominent feature of this management. The United States has pressured Mexican and Central American governments to intercept northward-bound migrants before they reach the US border — effectively outsourcing American immigration enforcement to sovereign states that have no constitutional obligation to conduct it. Critics argue that this arrangement compromises the sovereignty of Mexico and its southern neighbours, transforming them into buffer states whose primary function, in American strategic terms, is to manage population flows that the United States itself is unwilling or unable to regulate at its own frontier.

Diaspora, Demographics, and Political Influence

The Mexican-American diaspora — numbering more than 36 million people by most estimates — is one of the most politically significant communities in the United States. Its members vote, pay taxes, run for office, and constitute a growing share of the electorate in strategically critical states including California, Texas, Arizona, and Nevada. The political mobilisation of the Latino diaspora — a broader community of approximately 63 million people — has fundamentally altered the demographic calculus of American electoral politics, forcing both major parties to address immigration, trade, and Latin American foreign policy with a seriousness that was absent from mainstream political discourse as recently as the 1980s.

This demographic shift carries consequences that extend well beyond US domestic politics. As the Latino share of the American electorate grows, so does the potential for diaspora communities to function as a form of informal bilateral diplomatic channel — lobbying Washington on issues that directly affect their countries of origin, and simultaneously shaping the way those countries engage with the United States. The diaspora, in this sense, is not merely a population statistic. It is a geopolitical actor in its own right.

True or False

Write **T** for True or **F** for False.

1. ___ The Monroe Doctrine was first articulated by President Roosevelt in 1904.
2. ___ USMCA was ratified and entered into force in July 2020.
3. ___ Canada sends roughly three-quarters of its exports to the United States.
4. ___ In 2023, remittances surpassed oil revenues to become Mexico's largest source of foreign currency.
5. ___ The US-Mexico border is the most frequently crossed international boundary in the world.
6. ___ The Latino diaspora in the United States numbers approximately 63 million people.
7. ___ NAFTA eliminated all tariffs on North American trade immediately upon coming into force in 1994.
8. ___ Remittances represent between 15 and 25 percent of GDP in several Central American nations.

Comprehension Questions — Passage 2

1. Why does the passage argue that remittances function as "an invisible constraint on Mexican sovereignty"?

2. What fundamental tension does the passage identify in US border policy, and why has it never been resolved?

3. What does the passage mean by the United States "outsourcing" immigration enforcement?

4. How does the passage suggest the Latino diaspora has changed American electoral politics?

5. According to the passage, in what sense is the diaspora "a geopolitical actor in its own right"?

6. Why are remittances described as significant for Central American nations beyond Mexico?

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

Use the word bank to complete each sentence. Use each word only once.

geopolitics · sovereignty · hegemony · bilateral · multilateral · tariff · USMCA ·
remittances · diaspora · sanctions · Monroe Doctrine · extraterritorial

1. A nation's _____ — its supreme authority over its own territory — is one of the foundational principles of international law, but economic interdependence constantly tests the degree to which it can be exercised in practice.
2. The study of _____ reveals that decisions made in Washington about trade, immigration, and security have cascading consequences for every nation on the continent, whether or not those nations had any voice in making them.
3. When diplomatic negotiations failed, the coalition of nations imposed economic _____ — freezing assets, restricting trade, and barring officials from travel — in an attempt to compel a change in policy.
4. Unlike a _____ deal between just two countries, the USMCA binds all three North American governments simultaneously, meaning no party can renegotiate terms with one partner without the agreement of the third.
5. American _____ over the Western Hemisphere was not achieved through formal empire but through the overwhelming weight of US economic and military power relative to its neighbours.
6. The United States has sometimes used _____ authority — asserting jurisdiction over events that occurred on foreign soil — to prosecute crimes linked to American victims or interests, a practice that other nations have frequently contested as overreach.
7. A government may impose a _____ on imported goods to protect domestic industries, but trading partners typically retaliate with equivalent measures, and the resulting trade war often leaves both sides worse off.
8. The Irish _____ — spread across the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia — has historically played a significant role in shaping international responses to political events in Ireland, demonstrating how dispersed communities retain geopolitical influence long after migration.

PART 6 — Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or your class. There are no wrong answers — support your view with evidence and reasoning.

1. The Monroe Doctrine was announced in 1823 — two hundred years ago. Is the principle it established still relevant today? Does the United States still act as though it has special authority over the Western Hemisphere? Should it? Use evidence from the readings or current events to support your answer.
2. The passage describes remittances as "an invisible constraint on Mexican sovereignty." Do you think economic dependency of this kind represents a loss of genuine independence, or is it simply the normal reality of globalisation? Is there a meaningful difference between the two?
3. The United States has pressured Mexico to intercept migrants before they reach the US border — effectively asking Mexico to enforce American immigration policy. Is this a reasonable exercise of diplomatic influence, or does it compromise Mexican sovereignty? Who benefits from this arrangement, and who bears the costs?
4. The USMCA introduced enforceable labour standards designed to raise wages in Mexico and reduce the competitive advantage of lower Mexican labour costs. Is this a fair provision that protects workers, or an attempt by the United States and Canada to limit Mexico's economic competitiveness? Consider the argument from both sides.
5. The passage argues that the Latino diaspora has become "a geopolitical actor in its own right." Do you think immigrant communities should use their political influence in their adopted country to shape that country's foreign policy toward their homeland? What are the benefits and risks of this kind of political engagement?

ANSWER KEY — THE GEOPOLITICS OF NORTH AMERICA

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Part 2 — Vocabulary Matching

1. B — the study of how geographical features shape the political and strategic interests of states
2. F — the supreme authority a state exercises over its own territory, free from external control
3. C — the dominance of one powerful state over neighbouring or weaker states, often without direct military force
4. D — the free-trade treaty signed in 2018 replacing NAFTA, governing commerce among the three North American nations
5. A — sums of money regularly transferred by immigrant workers to family members in their country of origin
6. E — punitive measures such as trade restrictions or asset freezes imposed by one country on another to influence its behaviour
7. G — a community dispersed from its homeland but retaining cultural or emotional ties to its place of origin

Part 2 — Fill in the Blank

1. tariffs
2. remittances
3. Monroe Doctrine
4. bilateral
5. USMCA
6. diaspora

Part 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1

1. The Monroe Doctrine (1823) declared the Western Hemisphere closed to European colonisation and asserted any European attempt to extend influence in the Americas would be treated as a US security threat — establishing the principle of US hemispheric hegemony.
2. Shared borders, rivers, and resources create interdependence so deep that no government's decisions stay within its own territory. Geography determines trade routes, migration paths, and strategic vulnerabilities — it is an active structural force, not passive background.
3. Roosevelt added the assertion that the US had the right to intervene directly in Latin American nations to stabilise their economies or governments — going beyond Monroe's defensive declaration to claim an active right of intervention.
4. NAFTA: eliminated most tariffs over 15 years; deeply integrated manufacturing supply chains across all three countries; dramatically expanded agricultural trade; liberalised cross-border capital flows.
5. USMCA added: digital trade/e-commerce provisions; tighter auto rules of origin; stronger IP protections; enforceable labour standards to raise Mexican wages — all areas NAFTA had not addressed.
6. US is ~9× Canada's population, ~12× its GDP. Canada sends ~75% of exports to the US; the US sends only ~17% to Canada. US downturns hurt Canada far more severely than the reverse — a structural dependency shaping Canadian foreign policy.

Part 4 — True or False

1. F — The Monroe Doctrine was articulated by President James Monroe in 1823; Roosevelt's 1904 corollary extended it.
2. T — USMCA was signed in 2018 and ratified/entered into force in July 2020.
3. T — approximately three-quarters of Canada's exports go to the United States.
4. T — in 2023, remittances reached \$63.3 billion, surpassing oil revenues for the first time.
5. T — it processes more than 350 million legal crossings annually.
6. T — the broader Latino diaspora numbers approximately 63 million.
7. F — NAFTA eliminated tariffs over a 15-year phased transition, not immediately.
8. T — remittances represent 15–25% of GDP in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Part 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2

1. Mexico's \$63.3B in 2023 remittances (its largest foreign-currency source) means any government that antagonises Washington risks US policy responses — stricter enforcement or remittance restrictions — that would immediately harm millions of households, limiting Mexico's diplomatic freedom without any formal policy instrument.
2. Economic integration creates structural incentives for labour migration (workers move where wages are higher), while sovereignty demands border control. It is unresolved because fixing it fully would require either open migration or dismantling the integration that makes migration rational — neither politically viable.
3. The US pressures Mexico and Central American governments to intercept northward migrants before they reach the US border, effectively making those states enforce American immigration policy on their own territory — transferring cost and responsibility to sovereign nations that have no legal obligation to do so.
4. The ~63 million Latino electorate has forced both parties to take immigration, trade, and Latin American foreign policy more seriously. Its concentration in swing states (California, Texas, Arizona, Nevada) gives it disproportionate electoral influence.
5. Diaspora communities vote, lobby Washington, and shape US foreign policy toward their countries of origin — functioning as an informal diplomatic channel. They are not merely a demographic fact but an active political force influencing both domestic and foreign policy.
6. In Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, remittances represent 15–25% of GDP — far exceeding foreign-aid receipts. Washington's immigration decisions directly affect the daily economic lives of tens of millions of people who have no vote in American elections.

Part 5 — Fill in the Blank

1. sovereignty
2. geopolitics
3. sanctions
4. multilateral
5. hegemony
6. extraterritorial
7. tariff
8. diaspora

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STUDENT ANSWER SHEET

The Geopolitics of North America

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

Record all answers below. For Parts 6 and 7, use the space on your main worksheet.

PART 2A — Vocabulary Matching (write the letter)

1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____	5. _____	6. _____	7. _____
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PART 2B — Fill in the Blank

1. _____	4. _____
2. _____	5. _____
3. _____	6. _____

PART 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1

1. _____	4. _____
2. _____	5. _____
3. _____	6. _____

PART 4 — True or False (circle T or F)

1. T / F	2. T / F	3. T / F	4. T / F
5. T / F	6. T / F	7. T / F	8. T / F

PART 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2

1. _____	4. _____
2. _____	5. _____
3. _____	6. _____

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

1. _____	5. _____
2. _____	6. _____
3. _____	7. _____
4. _____	8. _____

Parts 6 and 7 — use the space provided in the main worksheet · American Language Center 18K · <https://18kenglish.com/>