Political Regions: A Primer

There are a number of ways peoples and societies define their domains. By far the most common is a hierarchical set of political regions. At the top is the region as a whole, be it a Kingdom, a Nation, or the similar, which is commanded by the person or persons in greatest authority. This region is often divided into sub-regions, each with its own ruler or administrator who answers to the highest authority. These in turn can be further sub-divided, each region becoming smaller and ruled by a figure of increasingly diminishing authority. Even so, it is useful to recall the axiom that "all politics are local", and the town leader may have more influence on your daily life than a distant king.

Standard Hierarchical Regions

These are the most prevalent types of political regions, starting with the usual hierarchy.

Kingdom

This represents the largest defined territory under unified rule. Analogous regions include Empire, Republic, Nation, Country, and City-State. This region is ruled by a King/Queen, Emperor/Empress, President, or other ultimate authority. Some regions may have a multipartite absolute authority, such as an Oligarchy or Supreme Council. Regions ruled by royalty may also have a civil authority elected by the people, such as a Prime Minister.

The region itself may be part of a larger multi-national body (the former Soviet Union or the present European Union are examples of this). In such cases each member nation will have representatives on a council overseeing the concerns of the multi-national group. This council adjudicates international matters for the member nations, such as rules on trade and immigration, but does not usually pass laws within the member nations.

The following are subdivisions of a Kingdom *et cetera* into smaller governed regions. The list is in order of descending rank of authority, and typically the lower ranks denote smaller regions contained within the one above it.

Principality

Highest subdivision of a kingdom, a region under the governance of a Prince/Princess. In more modern nations this equates to a State or Province, overseen by a Governor or Provincial Minister. A Principality may be a titular affair in some cases, particularly if the Prince or Princess is in the line of succession and more involved with the royal court than with their nominal territory. At other times a Prince or Princess may take their duties to heart and be very much engaged in the welfare of their citizens.

Duchy

Region under governance of a Duke/Duchess. May alternately be an Archduchy if governed by an Archduke/Archduchess, or Grand Duchy if governed by a Grand Duke/Grand Duchess.

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When under an Emperor/Empress instead of a King/Queen, a Duke is known as a Landgrave and a Duchess as a Landgravine, and the region is a Landgraviate. In more modern nations a Duchy equates to a State County or Department.

Marquisate

Region under governance of a Marquis/Marquess. When under an Emperor/Empress instead of a King/Queen, a Marquis is known as a Margrave and a Marquess as a Margravine, and the region is a Margraviate. A Marquisate is not a commonly found region, and Duchies are more often divided into Counties.

County

Region under governance of a Count/Countess. In some noble rankings a male Count is an Earl, but the female rank is always a Countess. A region under an Earl may be known as an Earldom rather than a County.

Many counties will also have a Sheriff, a regional officer who enforces laws outside of towns and cities, such as in the woods and wilds beyond town borders.. The sheriff is aided in these duties by Deputies, who are deputized to act on the sheriff's behalf, and Bailiffs, who are legal enforcement officers empowered to serve warrants and make arrests and seizures. In large counties the sheriff may have Undersheriffs, who are nearly equal in authority to the sheriff.

Lordship

Region under governance of a Lord/Lady. Most often this encompasses a single town, the Lord or Lady's manor, and the lands under the protection of the Lord/Lady. These lands include such things as woods, fields, and lakes, and the Lord/Lady issues grants and permits to the people allowing hunting, fishing, foraging, lumbering, and so forth. Wardens and Keepers may be appointed to prevent the taking of natural resources without permission. Tenancy in a lordship is at the behest of the Lord/Lady, with the tenants paying rents to their landlord in coin, goods, or service.

Township

A region of a County with a measure of corporate authority and self-governance. Consists of a town plus the outlying lands under the jurisdiction and protection of that town. Often overseen by a town council or an *ad hoc* assembly of citizens.

Community

Settlement or conurbation under governance of a Mayor, City Council, Burgomaster, or other municipal administrator. These are described in the next section.

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Communities

While some people live as nomads or in solitude, most people on Cidri live in communities. The two primary features of communities are the presence of dwellings and a degree of permanence. Often these communities are situated along thoroughfares or waterways, which facilitates travel and trade with neighboring communities. Communities may also have a predominant culture or population type, but as a community grows larger these can become more diverse.

There are a few major types of communities. What most distinguishes one type from another is the size of its population and the formality of its boundaries and governance. These are the generally recognized types of communities on Cidri.

Settlement

Settlements are nascent communities, those which are just getting starting and which often exist in a period of flux before they become established (or fail to do so). Settlement populations are frequently quite small, downward to just tens of members, and the dwellings are often rudely built or makeshift accommodations. One would struggle to find any amenities here, and even basic shelter may be hard to come by.

Hamlet

The smallest established community, a hamlet typically has less than a hundred residents living in a small collection of dwellings. Very few amenities are likely to be found here, and those which are, like a tavern or inn, will often be set up in someone's house. Mercantile opportunities involve bartering with the locals, or with traders who are passing through. A hamlet has no formal boundaries and exerts only minimal political influence on the region.

There is usually no formal governance or authority within a hamlet, though there may be an elder or chieftain who speaks for the community as a whole. Guards and patrols are drawn from the members of the community and matters of legal dispute are taken to regional authorities (or handled locally in an impromptu fashion).

Village

A village is a small settlement in a rural setting, with a population generally below a thousand residents. The boundaries of a village are informal and often defined by those areas of land currently under cultivation by farmers and herders. Basic amenities such as a tavern, inn, blacksmith, or general store may be found here. Schools of lower education might exist in a village as well. Large formal institutions, such as the Wizards Guild, are a rarity here.

A village may have a single leader or an elected council that represents them and handles civic planning. A village may have a few full-time guards or watchmen, otherwise defense is handled by the locals as needed. A local judge may be on hand to adjudicate disputes, though their quality and mercy varies widely from one village to the next.

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Town

A town is a well-established community with defined formal boundaries and a population typically in the low thousands. Many towns have existed for centuries and often boast permanent buildings of durable design. All the general amenities one would expect to find, from inns and shops to guild halls and physickers, are usually here. One will often find local specialties too, including crafts, culinary dishes and drinks, and businesses. Towns may have their own traditions, celebrations, and holidays unique to them, as well as historical figures and local legends. While there are "enclave towns" which are more homogeneous and may be unwelcoming or even hostile to outsiders, in general towns are diverse places with a variety of peoples and habits.

Towns are governed by a structured political body, often consisting of a mayor or other municipal coordinator, a pool of councilors or aldermen/alderwomen, and possibly some specialist liaisons who deal with specific areas of interest (markets and trade, farms, buildings, etc). Towns usually have a representative in the regional governing body as well, giving them some say over matters of wider import. Law enforcement may be handled by an undersheriff who answers to the regional sheriff. The undersheriff in turn has deputies and bailiffs at their command. Lower courts can be found here, and judges are expected to hew to regional law where established, though town rules may supersede these at times.

City

Cities have populations of several thousand or more, and are often located along major routes. These usually have every basic amenity imaginable, as well as many of obscure and esoteric interest. Major guild halls are here, along with schools and colleges of higher learning, advanced martial training academies, and the inevitable underground offices of the Thieves Guild. Each city has a wealth of history and traditions, and most are cosmopolitan places where races, cultures, careers, and personalities of many sorts may be encountered. Cities can be delightful, overwhelming, and even dangerous for the newcomer and the inexperienced.

A city government will have a mayor or the equivalent, alongside others of great responsibility and nearly equal rank, such as a comptroller (minister of finance), ombudsman, and civil engineer. A sheriff may be present, along with a cohort of deputies. A city will frequently have its own contingent of Guards overseen by Lieutenants, who in their turn are answerable to the Captain Of The Guards. Cities on rivers or coastlines often have a division of Water Guards who patrol the waterways for smugglers and other criminal elements. Higher courts are found in cities, where issues of jurisprudence are decided and laws codified. Appeals from lower courts are heard here as well, with some cases ultimately going before the King or other relevant authority when warranted.

Wards & Parishes

Some cities are so large that they themselves may be divided into more localized units of

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governance. The two most common city divisions are *wards* and *parishes*.

A ward is a portion of the city overseen by a secular body, such as a ward council. Their duties are largely administrative, though they hold a minor degree of discretionary authority, such as granting permits to merchants and inns, or ensuring buildings and properties are maintained. By and large they exist to administer laws and rules, not to devise or interpret them.

A parish is a portion of the city which is served by a temple, church, or other religious establishment. The parish authority will be the highest ranking clergy at the temple, such as a priest, and may include additional members of lower rank like curates. The authority of the parish extends to community events such as weddings, funerals, and the celebration of holidays. Individual parish authorities are not large bodies deciding doctrine, but rather are places of worship and observance, and as such they are expected to hew closely to the faith's teachings.

Note that wards and parishes are not an either-or situation, but rather a city is often segmented both ways. A citizen's civic oversight is the duty of the ward they live in, and their religious oversight is by their parish. In cities of many faiths it's entirely possible for parishes of different religions to overlap, each serving their own community of faithful.

Capitol

Almost always a city, and often the largest city in the region, the capitol is the seat of authority for the region. Due to being the central authority, it is typically well connected to other communities, both by methods of travel and by means of communication. If royalty is present here, one will find businesses and institutions relating to them, such as heralds who manufacture coats of arms and record royal histories, and the elite martial academy of the royal guard corps.

The highest authority for the region, be it a duke or prince or the king himself, will have a manor or palace here, often surrounded by extensive grounds. There will be the standard compliment of civic authorities to manage the city, as well as the ruler's own company of royal agents to deal with matters directly under their purview. If the region has a Chief Sheriff above the various civic sheriffs, they are usually based here. A supreme court may be found here, which is superlative to all other courts in the region, though the ruler may have the final word over even them.

County Seat

Just as a Capitol is the place of authority for a region, so a County Seat is the center of governance for a county. These are often found in rural counties where there are no communities larger than towns. In such cases one town functions as the county seat and it is where any political and legal framework for the county is located. Other towns in the county

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send representatives to the county seat when ballot measures and referendums are underway. A County Sheriff who ranks above the other sheriffs is often based here as well.

Burg

A Burg is a fortified town under the governance of a military leader, a Burgrave (male) or Burgravine (female), who has a rank equivalent to a Count. Within an Empire a Burg is known as a Burgraviate. Burgs are often located along strategic travel lines, or set as bulwarks guarding the region from hostile neighbors and dangerous wildlands.

Castellany

A Castellany consists of a castle and its surrounding lands, typically enclosed and fortified. The ruler of a castellany is a Castellan (either sex) and they possess a rank commensurate with a Count. Like burgs, castellanies are frequently located at key positions within the region, and are also used as neutral grounds when negotiations with other regions take place.

Non-human Communities

The communities listed here are drawn from a historical human perspective. While other races will often have similar communities, there are ways in which they vary. Halfling villages, dwarven cities, and goblin towns are often partially or fully underground, while elven communities are sometimes built in the high canopy of forests. But even when the surroundings and architectures of a community are decidedly non-human, many useful parallels can still be drawn with human communities. Likewise, many non-human civilizations also have a hierarchical system of rule and their own codified sets of laws.

Standard Associative Regions

These common regions may be found alongside or outside the top-down Kingdom structure.

Commonwealth

Independent region formerly associated with a kingdom or empire, and which may still have special relations with that domain. Laws and customs many vary minimally or significantly from the adjoining regions, and treaties may exist with other political powers.

Territory

A region under claim by a kingdom but not yet formally acknowledged as a state or integrated under systematic rule. Habitation by the claimants typically ranges from settlements to villages. There may also be an indigenous population distinct from the claiming society.

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Landhold

A region under the control of landlords with tenanting contracts in place with the occupants. A Farmhold is a subtype of landhold in which tenanting is specifically allocated to farmers and other goods producers. (The Holner Farmhold in *The Book of Unlife* is one such region.)

Freehold

A region held in permanent tenancy and unbound by leasing contracts. The tenants have complete freedom as to the use and disposition of the lands within the territory.

Free City/Autonomous City

A city or town under self-rule. The city may be protected by agreements with its neighbours, by advantageous geographical location, or by serving as a place of legal and moral laxity where certain items and services can be obtained that are prohibited in the surrounding regions. May also serve as a sanctuary for those fleeing their own society. A few free cities are so large and powerful that they have armies and navies greater than some nations.

Encampment

An encampment is any place where a nomadic group has set up camp. The members of the group are not citizens of the region, but inhabit it and travel through it, making (usually) temporary homes where they stop. Their nomadic migrations may take them through many regions. Often there is an understanding with these regions, allowing for free travel so long as the nomads do not break serious local laws. In return, the informal bounds of the encampment are honored by locals and the nomads can observe their own laws and customs within this transient space. This is not to say that friction never occurs between settlements and encampments – conflict can easily arise from contention over resources, cultural differences, or latent distrust. Races such as Neanderthals, humans, orcs, and centaurs are well represented among the various nomad tribes. As these races can be known for their bellicosity, a wise traveler approaches any unfamiliar encampment with caution and respect, until they have learned the measure of the people living within it.

Wildland & Waste

An unclaimed and largely uninhabited region without any rule or jurisdictional oversight. A wildland is dominated by nature, such as dense forest or grasslands, whereas a waste is typically sparse and harsh, like desert or tundra. May be home to nomads, transient communities, hermits, and outcasts.

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Special Regions

These are uncommon regions, or regions administered by people which do not fit into the usual ruling hierarchy.

Electorate

Region under governance of a Prince Elector/Princess Elector, one who an elector of the Emperor/Empress. Electors would select the Emperor/Empress at times of succession, and thus were considered second in power only to those rulers.

Palatinate

A region governed by a Count Palatine, a secular ruler equal to a Prince. A Count Palatine holds power separate from the Emperor and may even be an elector of the Emperor, in which case their title becomes Elector Palatine. A palatinate is sometimes called a County Palatine.

Bishopric

A diocese under governance of a Bishop. Often includes ecclesiastic landholds.

Provosty

An ecclesiastic town or community under governance of a Provost.

Abbey

A monastery (male monastics) or convent (female monastics) under governance of an Abbot/Abbess. Many abbeys are functionally a village or fortification unto themselves.

Penal Colony

A region, typically remote and apart from other societies, settled by criminals. Usually this is a forced exile and the environment is a harsh one. But over time it can mature into a stable region. During its formative period however life can be very difficult and highly dangerous.

Contested Territory

A region claimed by two or more kingdoms. Often a site of conflict between those powers. May also have an indigenous population which is resident to none of the kingdoms claiming the territory.

Buffer Zone

A region between kingdoms where none may make claims of territoriality. The zone is typically unoccupied, but it may have a resident population holding no loyalty to any of the kingdoms. Also known as a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a Neutral Zone, and a *cordon sanitaire*.

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Feudal versus Allodial

A feudal territory, or fief, has a contract with the ruler(s) and owes services, taxes, or other duties to the ruling class. An allodial, or free, territory has no such contract and is not bound to render anything to the ruling class. An allodial territory still acknowledges the sovereignty of the ruler under whose domain it resides, but the ruler is not an overlord to the citizens of that region. Commonwealths and Freeholds are among the allodial territory types.

Domains

The most basic and common feudal region hierarchies encountered on Cidri are of the Kingdom > Duchy > City/Town type. In larger kingdoms one may find Principalities or Counties as additional divisions. Territories, Landholds, and Freeholds are quite numerous, and Commonwealths are not unknown either. And of course there are many, many Wildlands and Wastes out there.

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