

What is a territory? Comparative federalism and state formation in North America

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2022.2158922>



What is a Territory?

Territories are **federal possessions** with **restricted self-government** and **limited pathways to full constitutional membership** in their respective federations.

Territories served two historical purposes:

1. To provide a mechanism for the **orderly absorption of new land**
2. To impose **uniform political systems** across that land

Territories are a common form of **subnational government** in the United States and Canada.



Canada

Although territories were a tool for **expanding settler states**, the legal structure of Canadian territories is flexible. This has created space for recognizing and empowering **Indigenous forms of government**.

Canadian Territories

- Northwest Territories
- Nunavut
- Yukon



United States

American territories and their residents are held at arm's-length from the rest of the US, both in their **exclusion from federal governance** and, in the case of American Samoa, the full rights of **citizenship**.

American Territories

- American Samoa
- Guam
- Northern Mariana Islands
- Puerto Rico
- US Virgin Islands