

# Artemis Space Program

## *How should missions to the moon be governed?*

### Key Concepts:

**Nationalism:** Pride in and promotion of one's nation, often expressed through competition with other nations for prestige, power, or resources.

**Sovereignty:** The right of a state (or other actor) to govern a territory and make rules within it — in space, this concept is legally unresolved.

On April 1, 2026, NASA launched Artemis II: the first crewed mission to travel toward the Moon since 1972. Four astronauts are aboard: three Americans and Jeremy Hansen of Canada, the first non-American ever to travel beyond Earth's orbit. Their spacecraft will loop around the Moon on a 10-day mission before returning to Earth. This is not a landing; it is a test flight to prepare for crewed lunar landings beginning in 2028.

But Artemis II is about more than technology. It is also about national power. During the Cold War, the US and Soviet Union competed in a "Space Race," partly to prove which system (democracy/capitalism or communism) was superior. Today, the US and China are engaged in a similar contest. China is building its own lunar program, the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS), and aims to land astronauts by 2030. Unlike the Apollo era, this race involves private companies as well as governments, and dozens of smaller nations are choosing sides.

The US has built a framework called the Artemis Accords: a set of non-binding rules for space

exploration signed by 61 countries. The Accords promote transparency and cooperation, but they also assert that countries can legally extract the Moon's resources, including water ice near the south pole. China and Russia reject this position, arguing it contradicts the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which says no nation can claim the Moon as its territory.

This is where nationalism and sovereignty collide. Both the US and China describe their missions as peaceful and scientific. But both are also trying to shape the rules that will govern a place that technically belongs to no one, but increasingly matters to everyone.



## Comprehension Questions

1. What is Artemis II and why is it significant?
2. Explain the difference between the Artemis Accords and China's ILRS framework.
3. Why is the lunar south pole of particular interest to countries with moon programs?
4. In what way does nationalism shape the goals and communication of the Artemis program?
5. What does the 1967 Outer Space Treaty say about ownership of the Moon, and why is this significant today?

## Thinking Questions

1. To what extent do you believe that Artemis II is about science rather than national competition?
2. How does the composition of the Artemis II crew (first woman, first person of colour, first non-American in deep space) function as a political statement? Is this a form of nationalism, or something else?
3. Compare the US-led Artemis Accords with China's ILRS. What does each framework reveal about competing visions of how space should be governed?
4. The Outer Space Treaty says the Moon cannot be "appropriated" by any nation, yet both the US and China are establishing influence there. Is this a contradiction?
5. What issues might arise if the moon is governed by competing national frameworks?



## Further Research

1. Do further research into the Artemis Accords and the 1967 Outer Space treaty. How are they meant to govern state action and cooperation for space missions?

### Artemis Accords

### Outer Space Treaty (1967)

2. How might these two treaties be used to govern future space travel?