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Culture and Political Conflicts

Over the past two decades, the topics of culture and conflict have been the subject of controversy among both academic specialists and the public alike. A key factor shaping attitudes in the West, at least for a period of time, was the "clash of civilizations" envisioned by Samuel Huntington in 1993. While other researchers (Fukuyama 1992) foresaw "the end of history" following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Huntington was convinced that culture would become the driving force behind future international tensions. He was particularly concerned about the fault lines running between the Western and the Islamic world. Now, more than 20 years later, Huntington's thesis has been subjected to extensive scrutiny by social scientists, and a clash of civilizations as he originally described was not found, neither on the international policy level nor among nation-states. The article presents the empirical topography of the various forms of cultural conflict and illustrates select examples. Following that, the causes of cultural conflict are analyzed and the ability of specific cultural factors to explain conflict is examined.