

# Culture Wars in One Page

In political science, a **culture war** is a type of cultural conflict between different social groups who struggle to politically impose their own **ideology** (beliefs, virtues, practices) upon their society. In political usage, the term culture war is a metaphor for 'hot-button' politics about values and ideologies, realised with intentionally adversarial social narratives meant to provoke political polarisation amongst mainstream society over economic matters, public policy, and of consumption. As practical politics, a culture war is about social 'wedge' issues that are based on abstract arguments concerning the correctness of **values, morality, and lifestyle**. It is meant to provoke political cleavage in a multicultural society.

The term culture war has been around for a long time. It was originally coined as the German word '**Kulturkampf**' (Cultural Battle) with regard to the power struggle between Prussian and Catholic authorities in Germany during the 1870s. They fought over the influence each had over civil appointments to government, and who ran educational institutions. The kulturkampf involved considerable background antisemitism.

However, for most of us, cultural struggle means the contemporary 'slow war' between supposedly polarised social forces. For example, between Black and White communities, Christians and Atheists, LGBT and 'straight' people, trans' and cis' folk, etc. This is formed around sloganised terminology (**Antifa, Black Lives Matter, TERFism, Woke, etc.**) and is deliberately created to enhance political divisions. The motivation for division is often related to creating in-groups and out-groups, thus solidifying the foundation of extreme politics and allowing a far greater influence for reactionary policy.

The term itself first became popular in **1991** when coined by US sociologist **James Davison Hunter**, who examined the conflict between the trends towards **Progressivism** and **Orthodoxy** in American society. Historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez attributes the 1990s emergence of culture wars as a consequence of the end of the Cold War. She writes that Evangelical Christians had viewed a particular Christian masculine gender role as the only US defence against the threat of communism. When this threat ended upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, Evangelical leaders transferred the perceived source of threat from foreign influences to domestic changes in gender roles and sexuality. Similarly, political commentator E. J. Dionne has written that culture war is an electoral technique to exploit differences and grievances, remarking that the real cultural division is *"between those who want to have a culture war and those who don't."*

The most active battleground for culture warfare is the Internet. Internet and social media manipulation are the prime vehicles for spreading disinformation due to the importance of digital platforms for media consumption and everyday communication. When employed for political purposes, internet manipulation may be used to steer public opinion, create moral panic, polarise citizens, circulate conspiracy theories, and silence political dissidents.