

Module: Cultural Geography
Topic Content: Political Divisions

Political Divisions



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Module: Cultural Geography

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Reasons for Political Divisions



Reasons for Political Divisions

- States may form based on language, ethnicity, or religion
- Distinct cultural regions may become countries
- A group's cultural identity may become tied to land
- Fighting occurs to retain historical boundaries
- Influenced by imperial conquest and colonialism
- Influenced by economic similarities and differences

Political divisions exist for a variety of reasons. Many states were formed based on cultural characteristics like language, ethnic background, and religion. These cultural characteristics have the potential to unite people into a distinct cultural region, which becomes the foundation for a country.

Over time, the land inhabited by a group of people can become tied to their cultural identity. Because of this, many nations fight to retain land based on historical boundaries. Imperial conquest and colonialism have also influenced political divisions. For example, the Spanish Empire colonized most of the South American continent, but Brazil was a Portuguese colony. These colonial boundaries remain relatively the same in modern times.

Beyond cultural factors, economic similarities and differences are a major reason for political divisions. Land and natural resources are valuable, which is part of the reason why countless wars have been fought over national borders.

Module: Cultural Geography

Topic Content: Political Divisions

Reasons for Conflict: Territorial Disputes



Disputes over boundaries and territory have been a common reason for conflict throughout history. Some contemporary examples include:

- India and Pakistan's dispute over Kashmir;
- China's dispute over the sovereignty of Taiwan; and
- Israel and Syria's dispute over the Golan Heights.

Another example is the territorial dispute over the Western Sahara region. The conflict began in 1975 between the country of Morocco and a group known as the Polisario Front. Morocco claims the Western Sahara and benefits from the territory's natural resources. The Polisario Front is a rebel group fighting to create an independent state for the Sahrawi people in the region.

Module: Cultural Geography

Topic Content: Political Divisions

Reasons for Conflict: Cultural Differences



Cultural differences are another common cause of conflict among nations. These conflicts may also exist within a country, as is the case with the Canadian province of Quebec. Quebec is a francophone province with French cultural roots. Many of its inhabitants view themselves as culturally distinct from the rest of Canada, which speaks English and has stronger ties to British culture. This division has led to conflict and calls for an independent Quebec.

Module: Cultural Geography

Topic Content: Political Divisions

Reasons for Conflict: Economic Differences



Throughout history, people have fought each other to control areas of land. The reason is that land has value. This is particularly true when an area is fertile in an otherwise arid climate, or is rich in natural resources. When resources are scarce, it can lead to aggressive competition over access to fresh water, access to the coast, and fishing rights. In the twentieth century, the economic philosophies of capitalism and communism created a major division around the world, which reached its peak during the Cold War.

Module: Cultural Geography

Topic Content: Political Divisions

Reasons for Conflict: Ethnic Differences



Ethnic differences are another reason for conflict between political divisions. For instance, in the Balkans, wars divided Yugoslavia into separate countries roughly based on ethnic background. In the Middle East, an ethnic population known as the Kurds inhabits large parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Although they are the fourth-largest ethnic group in the region, the Kurds do not have a nation of their own. Many Kurdish people have pushed for the creation of an independent state known as Kurdistan, which has resulted in fighting throughout the region.