Samuel P. Huntington

For other people named Samuel Huntington, see Samuel Huntington (disambiguation).

Samuel Phillips Huntington (April 18, 1927 – December 24, 2008) was an influential American conservative political scientist, adviser and academic. He spent more than half a century at Harvard University, where he was director of Harvard’s Center for International Affairs and the Albert J. Weatherhead III University Professor. During the Carter administration, Huntington was the White House Coordinator of Security Planning for the National Security Council. He is most well known by his 1993 theory, “The Clash of Civilizations”, of a post-Cold War new world order. He argued that future wars would be fought not between countries, but between cultures, and that Islamic extremism would become the biggest threat to Western world domination. Huntington is credited with helping to shape U.S. views on civilian-military relations, political development, and comparative government.\[1\]

1 Early life and education

Huntington was born on April 18, 1927, in New York City, the son of Richard Thomas Huntington, a publisher of hotel trade journals, and Dorothy Sanborn (née Phillips), a short-story writer.\[2\][3] His grandfather was publisher John Sanborn Phillips. He graduated with distinction from Yale University at age 18, served in the U.S. Army, earned his Master’s degree from the University of Chicago, and completed his Ph.D. at Harvard University where he began teaching at age 23.\[4\]

2 Academic career

He was a member of Harvard’s department of government from 1950 until he was denied tenure during 1959.\[5\] From 1959 to 1962 he was an associate professor of government at Columbia University where he was also deputy director of their Institute of War and Peace Studies. Huntington was invited to return to Harvard with tenure during 1963 and remained there until his death. He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences during 1965.\[6\] Huntington and Warren Demian Manshel co-founded and co-edited Foreign Policy. Huntington stayed as co-editor until 1977.\[7\]

His first major book was The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (1957), which was highly controversial when it was published, but presently is regarded as the most influential book on American civil-military relations.\[8\][9][10] He became prominent with his Political Order in Changing Societies (1968), a work that challenged the conventional opinion of modernization theorists, that economic and social progress would produce stable democracies in recently decolonized countries. As a consultant to the U.S. Department of State, and in an influential 1968 article in Foreign Affairs, he advocated the concentration of the rural population of South Vietnam as a means of isolating the Viet Cong. He also was co-author of The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies, a report issued by the Trilateral Commission during 1976. During 1977 and 1978, in the administration of Jimmy Carter, he was the White House Coordinator of Security Planning for the National Security Council. Huntington continued to teach undergraduates until his retirement in 2007.

3 Political position

Huntington was a lifelong Democrat and liberal on domestic matters. In relation to foreign policy he was a conservative.

4 Personal life

He met his wife, Nancy Arkelyan, when they were working together on a speech for 1956 presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson. They had two sons, Nicholas and Timothy.\[11\] After several years of declining health, Huntington died on December 24, 2008, at age 81 in Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts.\[2\]

5 Notable arguments

5.1 Political Order in Changing Societies

Main article: Political Order in Changing Societies

During 1968, just as the United States’ war in Vietnam was becoming most intense, Huntington published Political Order in Changing Societies, which was a critique of
the modernization theory which had affected much U.S. policy regarding the developing world during the prior decade.

Huntington argues that, as societies modernize, they become more complex and disordered. If the process of social modernization that produces this disorder is not matched by a process of political and institutional modernization—a process which produces political institutions capable of managing the stress of modernization—the result may be violence.

During the 1970s, Huntington was an advisor to governments, both democratic and dictatorial. During 1972, he met with Medici government representatives in Brazil; a year later he published the report “Approaches to Political Decompression,” warning against the risks of a too-rapid political liberalization, proposing graduated liberalization, and a strong party state modeled upon the image of the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). After a prolonged transition, Brazil became democratic during 1985.

During the 1980s, he became a valued adviser to the South African regime, which used his ideas on political order to craft its “total strategy” to reform apartheid and suppress growing resistance. He assured South Africa’s rulers that increasing the repressive power of the state (which at that time included police violence, detention without trial, and torture) can be necessary to effect reform. The reform process, he told his South African audience, often requires “duplicity, deceit, faulty assumptions and purposeful blindness.” He thus gave his imprimatur to his hosts’ project of “reforming” apartheid rather than eliminating it.[11]

Huntington frequently cited Brazil as a success, alluding to his role in his 1988 presidential address to the American Political Science Association, commenting that political science played a modest role in this process. Critics, such as British political scientist Alan Hooper, note that contemporary Brazil has an especially unstable party system, wherein the best institutionalized party, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s Workers’ Party emerged in opposition to controlled-transition. Moreover, Hooper claims that the lack of civil participation in contemporary Brazil results from that top-down process of political participation transitions.

5.2 The Third Wave

In his 1991 book, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, Huntington made the argument that beginning with Portugal’s revolution during 1974, there has been a third wave of democratization which describes a global trend which includes more than 60 countries throughout Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa which have undergone some form of democratic transition. Huntington won the 1992 University of Louisville Gravemeyer Award for this book.[12]

5.3 “The Clash of Civilizations”

For more details on this topic, see Clash of Civilizations. During 1993, Huntington provoked great debate among international relations theorists with the interrogatively-titled “The Clash of Civilizations?”, an influential, oft-cited article published in Foreign Affairs magazine. In the article, he argued that, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Islam would become the biggest obstacle to Western domination of the world. The next West’s big war therefore, he said, would inevitably be with Islam.[13] Its description of post-Cold War geopolitics and the “inseverability of instability” contrasted with the influential End of History thesis advocated by Francis Fukuyama.

Huntington expanded “The Clash of Civilizations?” to book length and published it as The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order in 1996. The article and the book posit that post-Cold War conflict would most frequently and violently occur because of cultural rather than ideological differences. That, whilst in the Cold War, conflict occurred between the Capitalist West and the Communist Bloc East, it now was most likely to occur between the world’s major civilizations—identifying seven, and a possible eighth: (i) Western, (ii) Latin American, (iii) Islamic, (iv) Sinic (Chinese), (v) Hindu, (vi) Orthodox, (vii) Japanese, and (viii) African. This cultural organization contrasts the contemporary world with the classical notion of sovereign states. To understand current and future conflict, cultural rifts must be understood, and culture—rather than the State—must be accepted as the reason for war. Thus, Western nations will lose predominance if they fail to recognize the irreconcilable nature of cultural tensions. Huntington argued that this post-Cold War shift in geopolitical organization and structure requires the West to strengthen itself culturally, by abandoning the imposition of its ideal of democratic universalism and its incessant military interventionism. The identification of Western Civilization with the Western Christianity (Catholic-Protestant) was not Huntington’s original idea, it was rather the traditional Western opinion and subdivision before the Cold War era.

Critics (for example articles in Le Monde Diplomatique) call The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order the theoretical legitimization of American-caused
Western aggression against China and the world’s Islamic and Orthodox cultures. Other critics argue that Huntington’s taxonomy is simplistic and arbitrary, and does not take account of the internal dynamics and partisan tensions within civilizations. Furthermore, critics argue that Huntington neglects ideological mobilization by elites and unfulfilled socioeconomic needs of the population as the real causal factors driving conflict, that he ignores conflicts that do not fit well with the civilizational borders identified by him, and that they charge that his new paradigm is nothing but realist thinking in which “states” became replaced by “civilizations”. Huntington’s influence upon U.S. policy has been likened to that of British historian Arnold Toynbee’s controversial religious theories about Asian leaders during the early twentieth century.

The *New York Times* obituary on Samuel Huntington notes, however, that his “emphasis on ancient religious empires, as opposed to states or ethnicities, [as sources of global conflict] gained...more cachet after the Sept. 11 attacks.”

Huntington wrote that the Ukraine might divide along the cultural line between the more Catholic western Ukraine and Orthodox eastern Ukraine:

> While a statist approach highlights the possibility of a Russian-Ukrainian war, a civilizational approach minimizes that and instead highlights the possibility of Ukraine splitting in half, a separation which cultural factors would lead one to predict might be more violent than that of Czechoslovakia but far less bloody than that of Yugoslavia.

5.4 *Who Are We* and immigration

Huntington’s last book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, was published during May 2004. Its subject is the meaning of American national identity and the possible cultural threat posed to it by large-scale Latino immigration, which Huntington warns could “divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages”.

5.5 Other

Huntington is credited with inventing the phrase *Davos Man*, referring to global elites who “have little need for national loyalty, view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the elite’s global operations”. The phrase refers to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where leaders of the global economy meet.

During the 1980s, the South African apartheid government of P.W. Botha became increasingly preoccupied with security. On Huntington’s advice, Botha’s government established a powerful state security apparatus to “protect” the state against an anticipated upsurge in political violence that the reforms were expected to cause. The 1980s became a period of considerable political unrest, with the government becoming increasingly dominated by Botha’s circle of generals and police chiefs (known as securocrats), who managed the various States of Emergencies.

6 National Academy of Sciences controversy

In 1986, Huntington was nominated for membership to the National Academy of Sciences. The entire academy voted on the nomination, although many scientists were unfamiliar with the nominee. Professor Serge Lang, a Yale University mathematician, disturbed this electoral status quo by challenging Huntington’s nomination. Lang campaigned for others to deny Huntington membership, and eventually succeeded; Huntington was twice nominated and twice rejected. A detailed description of these events was published by Lang in “Academia, Journalism, and Politics: A Case Study: The Huntington Case” which occupies the first 222 pages of his 1998 book *Challenges*.

Lang was inspired by the writings of mathematician Neal Koblitz, who accuses Huntington of misusing mathematics and engaging in pseudo-science. Lang claimed that Huntington distorted the historical record and used pseudo-mathematics to make his conclusions seem convincing. As an example he used Huntington’s 1968 book *Political Order in Changing Societies*, in which Huntington argued that South Africa was a “satisfied society” in the 1960s. Lang didn’t believe the conclusion, so he looked at how Huntington justified this claim and concluded that he used a method which was simply not valid. Lang suspected that he was using false pseudo-mathematical argument to give arguments that he wanted to justify greater authority. It was, said Lang, “a type of language which gives the illusion of science without any of its substance.” Lang documents his accusations in his book *Challenges*.

Huntington’s supporters included Herbert A. Simon, a 1978 laureate of the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel. The *Mathematical Intelligencer* offered Simon and Koblitz an opportunity to engage in a written debate, which they accepted.

Huntington’s prominence as a Harvard professor and (as then) director of Harvard’s Center for International Affairs led to significant coverage of his defeated nomination to the NAS by the media, including *The New York Times* and *The New Republic*.
7 Selected publications

- The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (1957),
- The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics (1961),
- Political Order in Changing Societies (1968),
- The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies (1976),
- American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony (1981),
- The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century (1991),
- The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (1996),
- Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress (2000)
- Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity (2004), an article based on the book is available after (free) registration at Foreign Policy

8 See also

- Intermediate Region
- Civilization
- Clash of civilizations
- Modernization theory
- Political geography
- New institutionalism
- Historical institutionalism
- Historical sociology
- International relations theory

9 References


10 External links

- Samuel Huntington explaining himself his book and thesis about the clash of civilization in a 1997 interview with Charlie Rose
• *The Crisis of Democracy* Trilateral Commission report

• Appearances on C-SPAN

• Sam Huntington discusses “Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity” with Jenny Attiyeh on Thoughtcast

• “Interview with Sam Huntington” by Amina R. Chaudary – a 2006 interview with *Islamica Magazine*

• Samuel P. Huntington – selected quotes
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11.1 Text


11.2 Images

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