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Civil war

A **civil war**^[a] is a war between organized groups within the same state (or country). The aim of one side may be to take control of the country or a region, to achieve independence for a region, or to change government policies.^[3] The term is a calque of Latin *bellum civile* which was used to refer to the various civil wars of the Roman Republic in the 1st century BC. *Civil* here means "of/related to citizens", a civil war being a war between the citizenry, rather than with an outsider.

Most modern civil wars involve intervention by outside powers. According to Patrick M. Regan in his book *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers* (2000) about two thirds of the 138 intrastate conflicts between the end of World War II and 2000 saw international intervention.^[4]

A civil war is often a high-intensity conflict, often involving regular armed forces, that is sustained, organized and large-scale. Civil wars may result in large numbers of casualties and the consumption of significant resources.^[5]

Civil wars since the end of World War II have lasted on average just over four years, a dramatic rise from the one-and-a-half-year average of the 1900–1944 period. While the rate of emergence of new civil wars has been relatively steady since the mid-19th century, the increasing length of those wars has resulted in increasing numbers of wars ongoing at any one time. For example, there were no more than five civil wars underway simultaneously in the first half of the 20th century while there were over 20 concurrent civil wars close to the end of the Cold War. Since 1945, civil wars have resulted in the deaths of over 25 million people, as well as the forced displacement of millions more. Civil wars have further resulted in economic collapse; Somalia, Burma (Myanmar), Uganda and Angola are examples of nations that were considered to have had promising futures before being engulfed in civil wars.^[6]

Formal classification

James Fearon, a scholar of civil wars at Stanford University, defines a civil war as "a violent conflict within a country fought by organized groups that aim to take power at the center or in a region, or to change government policies".^[3] Ann Hironaka further specifies that one side of a civil war is the state.^[5] Stathis Kalyvas defines civil war as "armed combat taking place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties that are subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities."^{[7][8]} The intensity at which a civil disturbance becomes a civil war is contested by academics. Some political scientists define a civil war as having more than 1,000 casualties,^[3] while others further specify that at least 100 must come from each side.^[9] The Correlates of War, a dataset widely used by scholars of conflict, classifies civil wars as having over 1,000 war-related



The destruction wrought on Granollers after a raid by German aircraft on 31 May 1938 during the Spanish Civil War

casualties per year of conflict. This rate is a small fraction of the millions killed in the Second Sudanese Civil War and Cambodian Civil War, for example, but excludes several highly publicized conflicts, such as The Troubles of Northern Ireland and the struggle of the African National Congress in Apartheid-era South Africa.^[5]

Based on the 1,000-casualties-per-year criterion, there were 213 civil wars from 1816 to 1997, 104 of which occurred from 1944 to 1997.^[5] If one uses the less-stringent 1,000 casualties total criterion, there were over 90 civil wars between 1945 and 2007, with 20 ongoing civil wars as of 2007.^[3]

The Geneva Conventions do not specifically define the term "civil war"; nevertheless, they do outline the responsibilities of parties in "armed conflict not of an international character". This includes civil wars; however, no specific definition of civil war is provided in the text of the Conventions.

Nevertheless, the International Committee of the Red Cross has sought to provide some clarification through its commentaries on the Geneva Conventions, noting that the Conventions are "so general, so vague, that many of the delegations feared that it might be taken to cover any act committed by force of arms". Accordingly, the commentaries provide for different 'conditions' on which the application of the Geneva Convention would depend; the commentary, however, points out that these should not be interpreted as rigid conditions. The conditions listed by the ICRC in its commentary are as follows:^{[10][11]}

1. That the Party in revolt against the de jure Government possesses an organized military force, an authority responsible for its acts, acting within a determinate territory and having the means of respecting and ensuring respect for the Convention.
2. That the legal Government is obliged to have recourse to the regular military forces against insurgents organized as military and in possession of a part of the national territory.
3.
 - (a) That the de jure Government has recognized the insurgents as belligerents;
 - (b) That it has claimed for itself the rights of a belligerent; or
 - (c) That it has accorded the insurgents recognition as belligerents for the purposes only of the present Convention; or
 - (d) That the dispute has been admitted to the agenda of the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations as being a threat to international peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression.
4.
 - (a) That the insurgents have an organization purporting to have the characteristics of a State.
 - (b) That the insurgent civil authority exercises de facto authority over the population within a determinate portion of the national territory.
 - (c) That the armed forces act under the direction of an organized authority and are prepared to observe the ordinary laws of war.



Aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg, American Civil War, 1863



Tanks in the streets of Addis Ababa after rebels seized the capital during the Ethiopian Civil War (1991)

(d) That the insurgent civil authority agrees to be bound by the provisions of the Convention.

Causes

According to a 2017 review study of civil war research, there are three prominent explanations for civil war: **greed-based explanations** which center on individuals' desire to maximize their profits, **grievance-based explanations** which center on conflict as a response to socioeconomic or political injustice, and **opportunity-based explanations** which center on factors that make it easier to engage in violent mobilization.^[12] According to the study, the most influential explanation for civil war onset is the opportunity-based explanation by James Fearon and David Laitin in their 2003 American Political Science Review article.^[12]

Greed

Scholars investigating the cause of civil war are attracted by two opposing theories, greed versus grievance. Roughly stated: are conflicts caused by differences of ethnicity, religion or other social affiliation, or do conflicts begin because it is in the economic best interests of individuals and groups to start them? Scholarly analysis supports the conclusion that economic and structural factors are more important than those of identity in predicting occurrences of civil war.^[13]

A comprehensive study of civil war was carried out by a team from the World Bank in the early 21st century. The study framework, which came to be called the Collier–Hoeffler Model, examined 78 five-year increments when civil war occurred from 1960 to 1999, as well as 1,167 five-year increments of "no civil war" for comparison, and subjected the data set to regression analysis to see the effect of various factors. The factors that were shown to have a statistically significant effect on the chance that a civil war would occur in any given five-year period were:^[14]

A high proportion of primary commodities in national exports significantly increases the risk of a conflict. A country at "peak danger", with commodities comprising 32% of gross domestic product, has a 22% risk of falling into civil war in a given five-year period, while a country with no primary commodity exports has a 1% risk. When disaggregated, only petroleum and non-petroleum groupings showed different results: a country with relatively low levels of dependence on petroleum exports is at slightly less risk, while a high level of dependence on oil as an export results in slightly more risk of a civil war than national dependence on another primary commodity. The authors of the study interpreted this as being the result of the ease by which primary commodities may be extorted or captured compared to other forms of wealth; for example, it is easy to capture and control the output of a gold mine or oil field compared to a sector of garment manufacturing or hospitality services.^[15]

A second source of finance is national diasporas, which can fund rebellions and insurgencies from abroad. The study found that statistically switching the size of a country's diaspora from the smallest found in the study to the largest resulted in a sixfold increase in the chance of a civil war.^[15]

Higher male secondary school enrollment, per capita income and economic growth rate all had significant effects on reducing the chance of civil war. Specifically, a male secondary school enrollment 10% above the average reduced the chance of a conflict by about 3%, while a growth rate 1% higher than the study average resulted in a decline in the chance of a civil war of about 1%. The study interpreted these three factors as proxies for earnings forgone by rebellion, and

therefore that lower forgone earnings encourage rebellion.^[15] Phrased another way: young males (who make up the vast majority of combatants in civil wars) are less likely to join a rebellion if they are getting an education or have a comfortable salary, and can reasonably assume that they will prosper in the future.^[16]

Low per capita income has also been proposed as a cause for grievance, prompting armed rebellion.^{[17][18]} However, for this to be true, one would expect economic inequality to also be a significant factor in rebellions, which it is not. The study therefore concluded that the economic model of opportunity cost better explained the findings.^[14]

Grievance

Most proxies for "grievance"—the theory that civil wars begin because of issues of identity, rather than economics—were statistically insignificant, including economic equality, political rights, ethnic polarization and religious fractionalization. Only ethnic dominance, the case where the largest ethnic group comprises a majority of the population, increased the risk of civil war. A country characterized by ethnic dominance has nearly twice the chance of a civil war. However, the combined effects of ethnic and religious fractionalization, i.e. the greater chance that any two randomly chosen people will be from separate ethnic or religious groups, the less chance of a civil war, were also significant and positive, as long as the country avoided ethnic dominance. The study interpreted this as stating that minority groups are more likely to rebel if they feel that they are being dominated, but that rebellions are more likely to occur the more homogeneous the population and thus more cohesive the rebels. These two factors may thus be seen as mitigating each other in many cases.^[19]

Criticism of the "greed versus grievance" theory

David Keen, a professor at the Development Studies Institute at the London School of Economics is one of the major critics of greed vs. grievance theory, defined primarily by Paul Collier, and argues the point that a conflict, although he cannot define it, cannot be pinpointed to simply one motive.^[20] He believes that conflicts are much more complex and thus should not be analyzed through simplified methods. He disagrees with the quantitative research methods of Collier and believes a stronger emphasis should be put on personal data and human perspective of the people in conflict.

Beyond Keen, several other authors have introduced works that either disprove greed vs. grievance theory with empirical data, or dismiss its ultimate conclusion. Authors such as Cristina Bodea and Ibrahim Elbadawi, who co-wrote the entry, "Riots, coups and civil war: Revisiting the greed and grievance debate", argue that empirical data can disprove many of the proponents of greed theory and make the idea "irrelevant".^[21] They examine a myriad of factors and conclude that too many factors come into play with conflict, which cannot be confined to simply greed or grievance.

Anthony Vinci makes a strong argument that "fungible concept of power and the primary motivation of survival provide superior explanations of armed group motivation and, more broadly, the conduct of internal conflicts".^[22]

Opportunities

James Fearon and David Laitin find that ethnic and religious diversity does not make civil war more likely.^[23] They instead find that factors that make it easier for rebels to recruit foot soldiers and sustain insurgencies, such as "poverty—which marks financially & bureaucratically weak states and also favors rebel recruitment—political instability, rough terrain, and large populations" make civil wars more likely.^[23]

Such research finds that civil wars happen because the state is weak; both authoritarian and democratic states can be stable if they have the financial and military capacity to put down rebellions.^[24]

Critical Responses to Fearon and Laitin

Some scholars, such as Lars-Erik Cederman of the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, have criticized the data used by Fearon and Laitin to determine ethnic and religious diversity. In his 2007 paper *Beyond Fractionalization: Mapping Ethnicity onto Nationalist Insurgencies*, Cederman argues that the ethno-linguistic fractionalization index (ELF) used by Fearon, Laitin and other political scientists is flawed.^[25] E.L.F. Cederman states, measures diversity on a country's population-wide level and makes no attempt to determine the number of ethnic groups in relation to what role they play in the power of the state and its military. Cederman believes it makes little sense to test hypotheses relating national ethnic diversity to civil war outbreak without any explicit reference to how many different ethnic groups actually hold power in the state. This suggests that ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages can matter, depending on the extent to which the various groups have ability and influence to mobilize on either side of a forming conflict.^[25] Themes explored in Cederman's later work criticizing the use of ethnic fractionalization measures as input variables to predict civil war outbreak relate to these indices not accounting for the geographical distribution of ethnic groups within countries, as this can affect their access to regional resources and commodities, which in turn can lead to conflict.^[26] A third theme explored by Cederman is that ethnolinguistic fractionalization does not quantify the extent to which there is pre-existing economic inequality between ethnic groups within countries. In a 2011 article, Cederman and fellow researchers describe finding that "in highly unequal societies, both rich and poor groups fight more often than those groups whose wealth lies closer to the country average", going against the opportunity-based explanation for civil war outbreak.^[27]

Michael Bleaney, Professor of International Economics at the University of Nottingham, published a 2009 paper titled *Incidence, Onset and Duration of Civil Wars: A Review of the Evidence*, which tested numerous variables for their relationship to civil war outbreak with different datasets, including that utilized by Fearon and Laitin. Bleaney concluded that neither ethnoreligious diversity, as measured by fractionalization, nor another variable, ethnic polarization, defined as the extent to which individuals in a population are distributed across different ethnic groups, were "a sufficient measure of diversity as it affects the probability of conflict."^[28]

Other causes

Bargaining problems

In a state torn by civil war, the contesting powers often do not have the ability to commit or the trust to believe in the other side's commitment to put an end to war.^[29] When considering a peace agreement, the involved parties are aware of the high incentives to withdraw once one of them has