



Civil Wars 1

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POLI 150

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Today's Class

- Civil Wars Definition
- Civil Wars: Grievances, Greed, and Rational Choice
- Civil Wars: Other Factors
- Civil War Strategies



Central Question

What is a civil war and why does it occur?



Key Terms

- Civil war
- Grievance explanations
- Greed explanations
- Rational choice approaches
- Anocracy/mixed regime



Civil Wars: Definition

- **Civil War:** a war in which the main participants are within the same state. Can involve a range of combatants:
 - State government vs. rebels.
 - Rebels vs. other rebels (vs. state).
- Technical requirements (from Correlates of War): 1000 battle-related deaths in a year on the government side, but on the rebel side either 100 committed troops or 25 battle-related deaths.



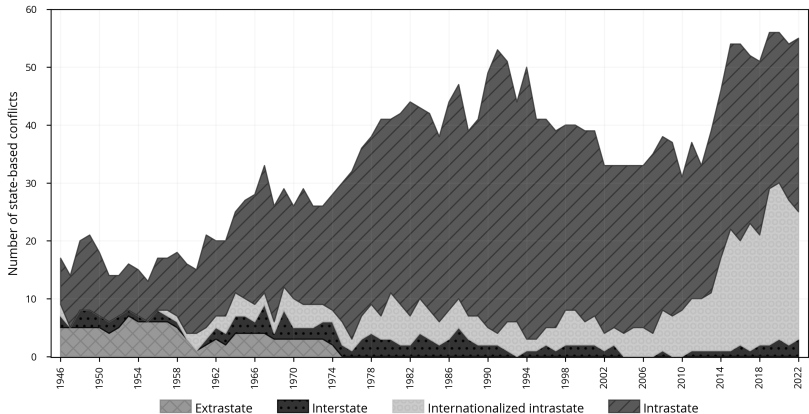
Civil Wars: Definition

- Civil wars can have three main subtypes:
 - 1 **Separatist**: a group is attempting to carve out their own state from territory that belongs to an existing state (e.g. South Sudan, East Timor, US Civil War).
 - 2 **Irredentist**: a group is fighting to detach a region from one state and then attach that region to another state (e.g. Northern Ireland, Ukraine pre-invasion).
 - 3 **Central Control**: a group is fighting to take control of the apparatus of government or extract concessions from the central government.
- Any of these can also be **internationalized**: foreign government(s) supporting at least one side with supplies or troops.



Armed Conflicts By Type

State-based conflicts by type of conflict (1946-2022)

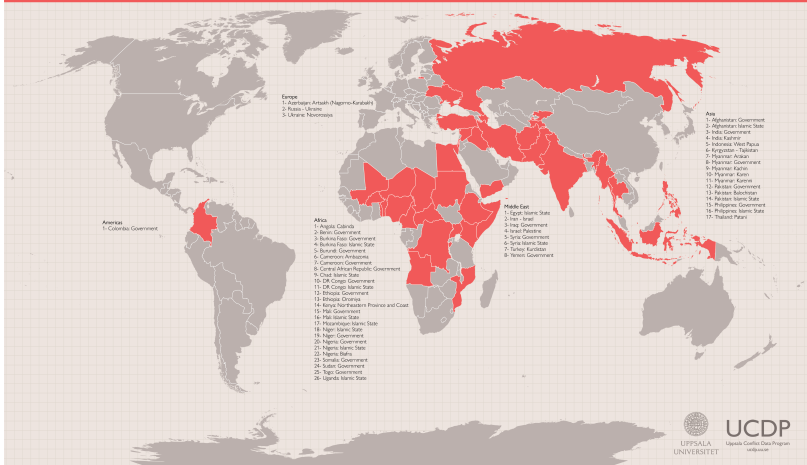


Based on UCDP 23.1 data



Conflict Locations

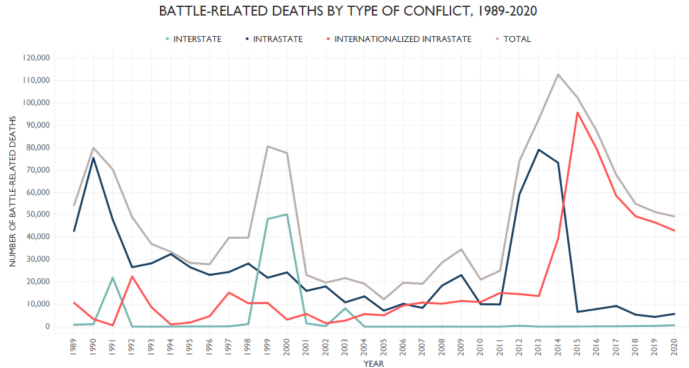
Active State-Based Conflicts in 2022



Based on UCDP 23.1 data | The Uppsala Conflict Data Program is the world's main provider of data on organized violence and the oldest ongoing data collection project for civil war, with a history of almost 40 years.



Civil War Deaths 2



Based on UCDP 21.1 data

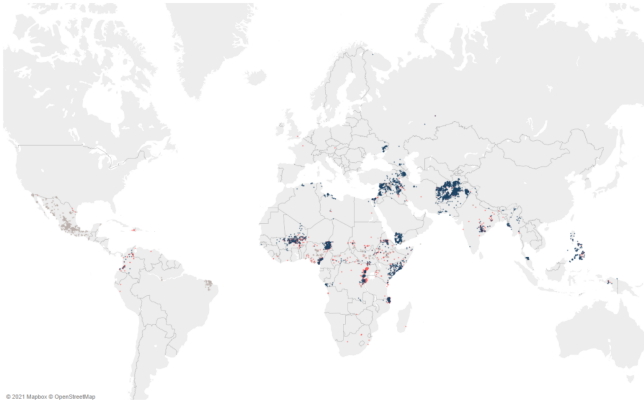


Conflict Deaths

Fatal events around the world in 2020 by type of violence

Each point represents the location of conflict events and the circle sizes vary depending on the sum of battle-related deaths

● State-based violence ● Non-state violence ● One-sided violence



© 2021 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap



US Civil War: Not Typical!





Civil War: Why Fight?

As in interstate war, the occurrence of civil war is a puzzle.

- War is always costly, but in a civil war those costs are guaranteed to occur on the domestic front.
- The state will generally be more powerful than any given rebel group, making chances of victory low.
- Rebel groups must also overcome collective action problems.



Political scientists have developed 3 general explanations for civil war at the group level, each of which supplements the others.

- 1 Grievances
- 2 Greed
- 3 Rational choice frameworks



Civil War Explanation: Grievances

- Any state will contain citizens who are dissatisfied with government policy.
- What separates the grievances explanation from that is that **these grievances are systemic, creating a domestic political situation with widespread inequality between groups.**
- The state may economically marginalize certain groups, and this systematic exclusion from opportunities to gain wealth may provide an impetus to join rebel groups (especially if those groups pay).
- These groups frequently form across ethnic and/or religious lines.



Civil War Explanation: Grievances

Any successful rebellion by such a marginalized group will presumably benefit the group as a whole, so how do they solve the collective action problem?

- Group norms of solidarity and cooperation may decrease free-riding.
- Aspiring rebel leaders may use ethnic or religious ties to mobilize networks, and the closeness of those networks enables monitoring for free-riders.
- Religious beliefs may both unify a group and provide non-material incentives to contribute.



Civil War Explanation: Grievances

However, civil war scholars have tended to argue that grievances are not the whole story. Why?

- **Every society has grievances of some kind, some of which rise to the level of systemic inequality, but not every society experiences civil war.**
- While grievances may increase the probability of civil war, they are not enough to cause one by themselves.
- Some work has also suggested that measures of grievance motivations really just measure susceptibility to mobilization.



Civil War Explanation: Greed

- “Greed” here is something of a misnomer.
- This category is best described as a catch-all category for several factors:
 - 1 Opportunity costs of fighting
 - 2 Impact of resources on group formation and conflict incentives
 - 3 State-level elements that influence conflict (covered later in this presentation)



Greed: Opportunity Costs

- **Opportunity cost:** in economics, the foregone gains from your next best option.
 - Ex: If job 1 pays you \$20,000/year and job 2 pays \$10,000 a year, job 1's opportunity cost is \$0, while job 2's opportunity cost is \$10,000.
- **At its core, this explanation argues that low opportunity costs for taking the “job” of being a rebel make rebellion more likely.**
- This implies that lower-income states should be more susceptible to civil wars.



Greed: Violence and Collective Action

Can violence in civil wars change the cost calculus of war?

- Thus far we've assumed war is costly for those who choose to fight in it. **But what if non-participation is costly too?**
- Insurgency tends to be characterized by violence against non-combatants from both government and rebels.
- If non-combatants are victimized, while combatants on either side get at least some protection from their chosen faction, then this changes the costs.
- **Participation in the conflict may be less costly than attempting to stay neutral, providing another solution to the collective action problem.**



- Running a rebellion is expensive.
- Some research (Weinstein 2007) has focused on whether lootable, fungible resources are available to rebel groups at their formation. This research argues that these resources shape the characteristics of the rebel group as well as its strategies of violence.
- How?
- Essentially, rebellions can be characterized into two types: those with an endowment of resources available at the beginning, and those without.



First, consider the case of rebels with an initial endowment of resources.

- The presence of these economic incentives means that rebel recruiters can recruit based off of selective incentives.
- “Join us and we’ll pay you / let you loot diamonds / etc.”
- This leads to a rebellion composed primarily of rebels who are self-interested, including those who joined purely for personal gain.



Now, consider the case of rebels without that initial endowment of resources.

- The lack of economic incentives means recruiters must find other ways to motivate participation.
- Instead of the promise of payment, they will appeal to preexisting social capital to motivate fighters.
- This frequently involves appeals to ethnic or religious in-groups (and this should remind you of the grievance mechanisms above).
- Note that this should exclude purely opportunistic recruits.



What does this mean for the rebel group's trajectory? Groups that formed via resource endowments will tend to:

- 1 Struggle to adequately control and discipline troops.
- 2 Respond to civilian resistance with authoritarian governance of their territories.
- 3 Likely struggle to limit indiscriminate violence by their soldiers.



What does this mean for the rebel group's trajectory? Groups that formed via social endowments will tend to:

- 1 More effectively shape and reinforce an organizational culture, leading to more controlled troops.
- 2 Strike bargains with civilians in their territories, avoiding widespread civilian resistance.
- 3 Likely have less indiscriminate violence committed by their soldiers.



Civil War Explanations: Rational Choice

This group of explanations applies Fearon's (1995) bargaining model to civil wars.

- **Incomplete information and incentives to misrepresent:** this argues that the usual incentives to misrepresent are just as present, if not even worse.
 - Very difficult for state to gauge rebel capabilities.
 - Rebel groups generally unable to demonstrate capacity without revealing their locations to the state.
 - Less pre-war diplomacy is possible, meaning that less information is shared.
 - Sovereignty concerns shrink (eliminate?) the bargaining range.



Civil War Explanations: Rational Choice

- **Incomplete information and incentives to misrepresent:** a weak explanation for a few key reasons.
 - Average civil war lasts 6-7 years. Lots of time to communicate information.
 - Rebel groups always substantially weaker than state governments.



Commitment problems can also occur:

- Shifting power: downturns in economy create incentives for rebels to fight as they gain recruits while the state weakens.
- **States cannot credibly commit to honor the terms of an agreement once the rebels disarm.**
- Rebel leaders cannot fully control their members, so cannot credibly commit to the cessation of violence.
- These commitment problems make peace agreements that end civil wars difficult, and often require third-party enforcement.



Civil War Explanations: Rational Choice

- **Commitment problems:** considered a much stronger explanation than information problems, especially because of two of those factors:
 - Rebels will not trust the state not to retaliate against them after disarmament, which any peace deal will generally require.
 - One or both sides may anticipate changes to the balance of power (especially in favor of the state) that render a deal non-credible.



Indivisibility: also a strong explanation.

- States may conceptualize sovereignty as an indivisible good, preventing them from making any meaningful concessions to rebel groups.
- States may be especially likely to do this if they contain many other groups of potential rebels.
- If a state makes concessions to placate one group, others may conclude that violent conflict is an effective way to influence the state.



Summary (So Far)

- **Grievance explanations:** explains group motivations in particular cases, but not sufficient to explain why civil war occurs in some cases but not others.
- **“Greed” explanations:** can explain group behavior and characteristics, as well as differences in how they treat civilians.
- **Rational choice explanations:** commitment problems provide strong incentives to keep fighting, as does indivisibility.



Additional Causes

- Greed vs. grievance was a long-running debate in IR.
- Eventually, scholars recognized the impact of both on civil wars.
- This narrow framework can also obscure some causes that don't fit neatly into either category, which is why the textbook groups causes by level:
 - Group-level
 - State-level
 - International-level



Group-Level Factors

- This is primarily concerned how groups overcome their greatest initial obstacle: the collective action problem.
- Strong in-group ties that facilitate collective action via norms of participation, monitoring for free-riders, and social capital all come into play here.
 - Ideology, ethnicity, tribal motivations, religious motivations.
- In the absence of those factors, groups can use material incentives or forced recruitment.
- Most grievance, greed, and rational choice causes apply at the group level.



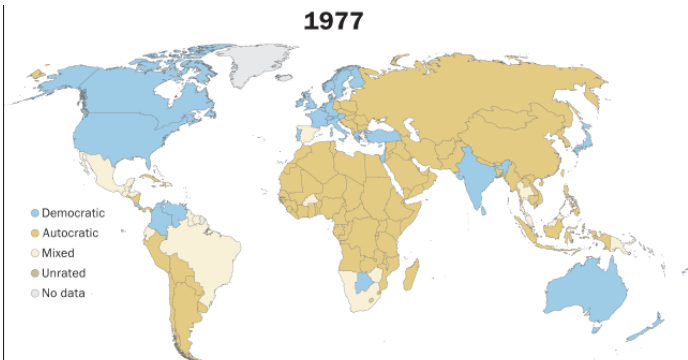
Country-Level Factors

Which type of regime is most likely to experience civil war?

- **Autocracy:** individuals are more likely to be aggrieved and excluded from the political process, while the state is likely to have a repressive apparatus.
- **Democracy:** a democratic state may have less repressive capacity, but citizens can also express and address their grievances via the electoral process.
- **Anocracy/mixed regime:** neither fully autocratic nor fully democratic, these regimes lack both the avenues for participation and repressive capacity.



Anocracy Over Time



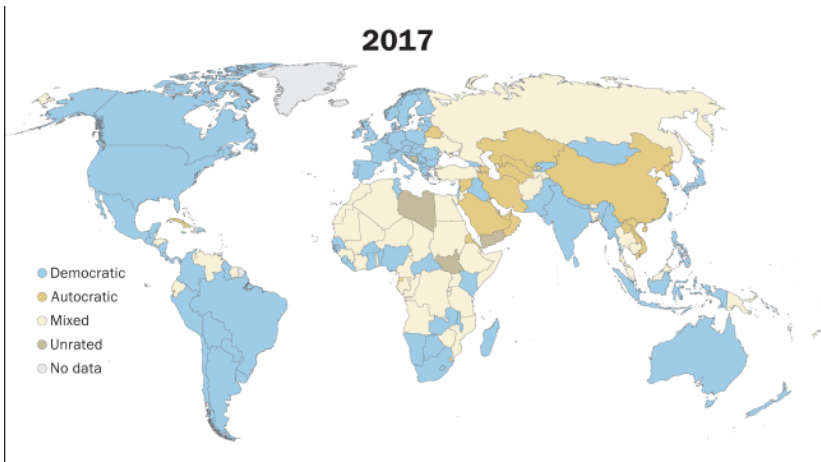
Note: Map depicts data for the 167 countries included in the Polity IV database. Countries labeled "mixed" have a blend of democratic and autocratic regime characteristics. "Unrated" countries are those whose central government has or had completely collapsed, which are or were subject to foreign intervention or occupation, or which are or were in the midst of a regime transition. "No data" refers to states or entities that either have fewer than 500,000 people or are not internationally recognized as fully sovereign.

Source: Center for Systemic Peace's Polity IV Project.

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Anocracy Over Time





Other Country-Level Factors

- **Wealth:** poverty makes individuals more desperate (lower opportunity costs of joining rebellion) and poor states are usually weaker than rich countries (meaning the state may struggle to suppress a rebellion).
- **Population:** more populous countries have a larger recruitment pool; larger population also allows the rebels to hide in it.
- **Size:** the larger the area, the harder to police (especially if lower state capacity).
- **Terrain:** mountainous or jungle terrain makes hiding from the state easier.



International Factors

- While states violently oppose rebel groups in their own territory, this does not necessarily mean they oppose all rebel groups in other states.
- States may support rebel groups within a rival's territory to weaken their rival.
- States may also support rebels with whom they share ethnic or ideological ties.
- Support can range from diplomatic support up to sending weapons and troops.



International Factors

- Any external support for at least one side makes a civil war **internationalized**: foreign government(s) supporting at least one side with supplies or troops.
- Some internationalized civil wars are **proxy wars**: at least 2 outside states each back opposing sides of a civil war.
- Diaspora groups can also lend economic support to groups (i.e. Irish Americans supporting the IRA).
- **Note that most civil wars do not turn into internationalized proxy wars**, but those wars attract disproportionate media coverage...



Internationalized Example: Syria

- 2011: protests against the Assad regime turn violent; rebel groups coalesce.
- As conflict continues, US provides limited support to rebels and strikes deal with Russia to dismantle Syrian chemical weapons.
- Rebel groups fragment and begin to fight each other, marking the formation of ISIS.
- Turkey, US, Saudi Arabia start to intervene on the side of the rebels.
- Iran and Russia provide military support to the Syrian government.



Internationalized Example: Syria

- Conflict continues as US supports (then later abandons) Kurdish rebels while Turkey starts attacking said rebels, later moving its own forces across the northern border, while still opposing the Syrian government.
- Some spillover into Lebanon, while Israel has also struck Iranian forces and Hezbollah near its borders.
- Russian intervention continues, pulling the Syrian government back from the brink of collapse.
- Fighting between regime and rebels winds down as regime retakes most of its territory.
- At present, violence has decreased from previous levels but skirmishes continue, involving Turkish military forces and assorted factions within Syria.



Internationalized Example: Syria





ACLED Map of Syria

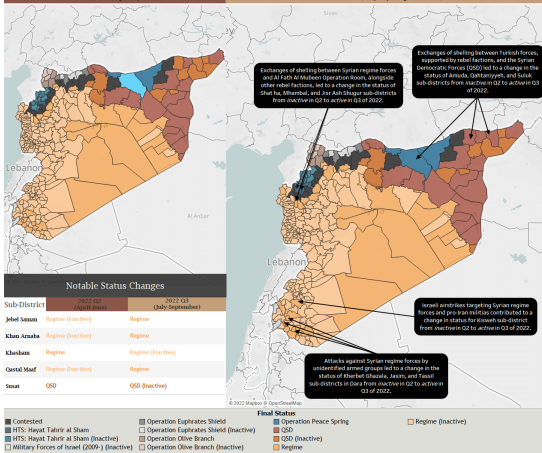
The State of Syria

Presenting ACLED's 3rd Quarter 2022 (July-September) control map of Syria, a quarterly examination of the country's changing political violence landscape.

ACLED's data-driven and expert-based State of Syria Map assigns control to conflict actors at the sub-district (nahiya) level of the country. The map denotes each sub-district as contested (colored black), inactive (not currently seen), or controlled by an actor (all other colors). Further, each actor in control of a sub-district is assigned two unique colors to signify whether, while under that group's control, violence has continued to be actively carried out by rival groups or whether the controlled area is generally "inactive." This allows viewers to examine in detail the changing scope, focus, and role of various actors in the Syrian conflict.

2022 Q2 (April-June)

2022 Q3 (July-September)



* This map will be released on a periodic basis, and a methodological piece can be found on the ACLED website.



Summary

- Civil wars occur within a state, as the government fights rebel group(s).
- Rebels typically motivated to fight by a combination of grievances, material incentives, and social ties.
- A rational-choice perspective shows that civil wars are exacerbated by commitment and indivisibility problems, while violence against non-combatants may change the costs of war.
- State-level factors such as state capacity and terrain can also impact rebellion viability.
- Civil wars can draw the attention of other international actors.



Closing Question

What about civilians?