



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



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 - 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.



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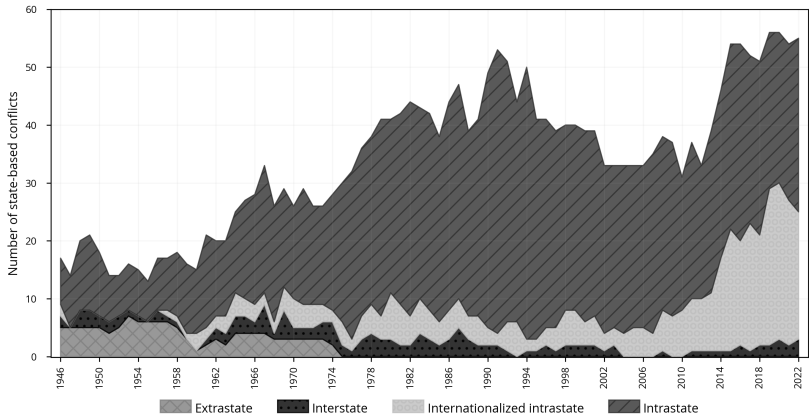
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- Any of these can also be **internationalized**: foreign government(s) supporting at least one side with supplies or troops.



Armed Conflicts By Type

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

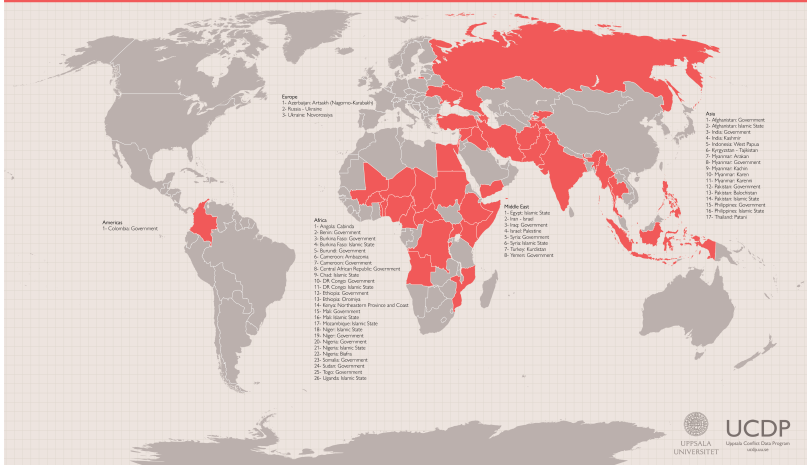


Based on UCDP 23.1 data



Conflict Locations

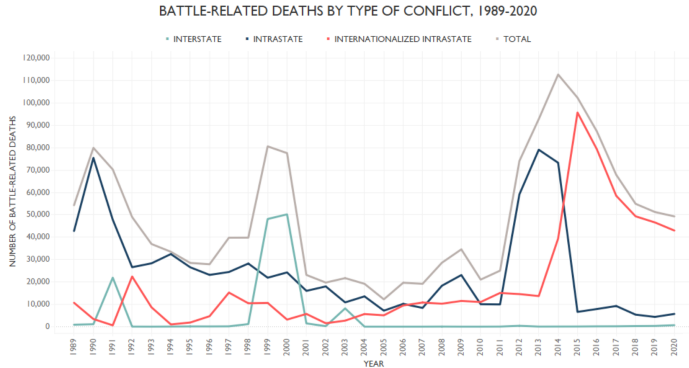
Active State-Based Conflicts in 2022



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

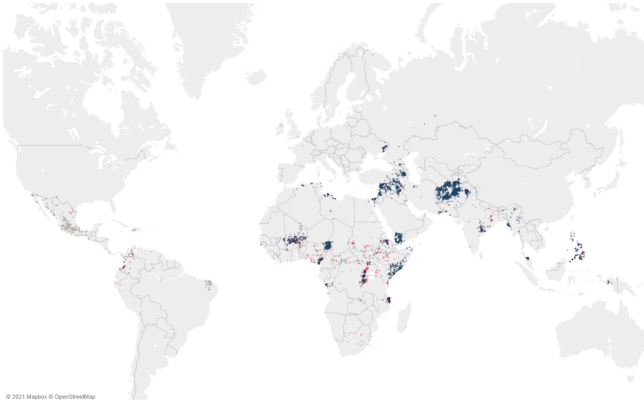


Conflict Deaths

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?

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- 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

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- 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.



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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?

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- Religious beliefs may both unify a group and provide non-material incentives to contribute.



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- **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.



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 - 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)



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- This implies that lower-income states should be more susceptible to civil wars.



Greed: Violence and Collective Action

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- 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.**



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- 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.



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- 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.



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- 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.



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 - Sovereignty concerns shrink (eliminate?) the bargaining range.



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 - Rebel groups always substantially weaker than state governments.



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- **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:
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- **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.



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- 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.



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- **“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

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- 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

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- 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.



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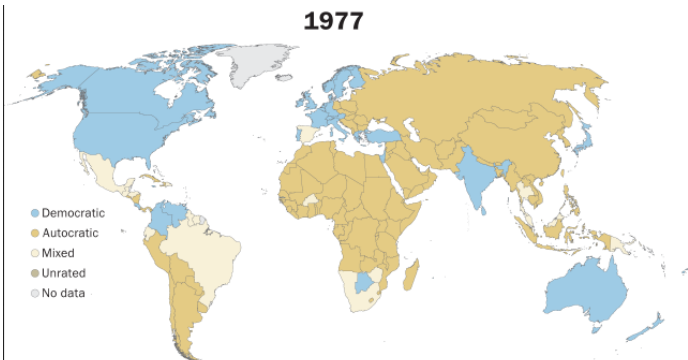
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- **Democracy:** a democratic state may have less repressive capacity, but citizens can also express and address their grievances via the electoral process.
- **Anocracy/mixed regime:** neither fully autocratic nor fully democratic, these regimes lack both the avenues for participation and repressive capacity.



Anocracy Over Time



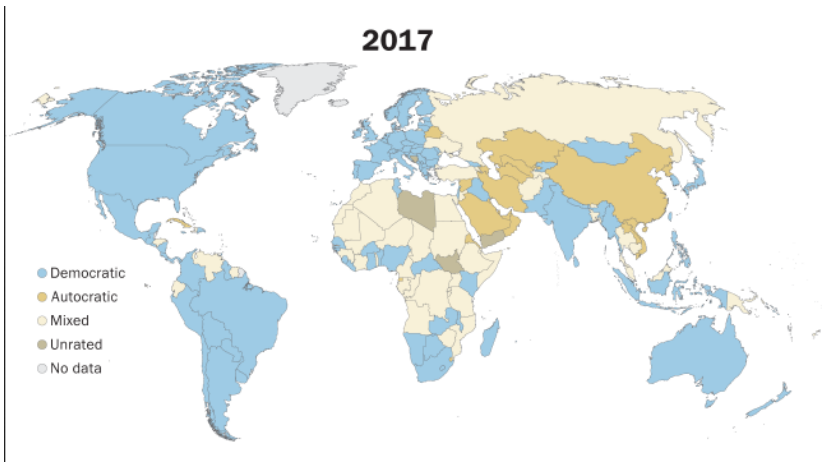
Note: Map depicts data for the 167 countries included in the Polity IV database. Countries labeled "mixed" have a blend of democratic and autocratic regime characteristics. "Unrated" countries are those whose central government has or had completely collapsed, which are or were subject to foreign intervention 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.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



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Other Country-Level Factors

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- **Terrain:** mountainous or jungle terrain makes hiding from the state easier.



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- Support can range from diplomatic support up to sending weapons and troops.



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- 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...



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- Iran and Russia provide military support to the Syrian government.



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- 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

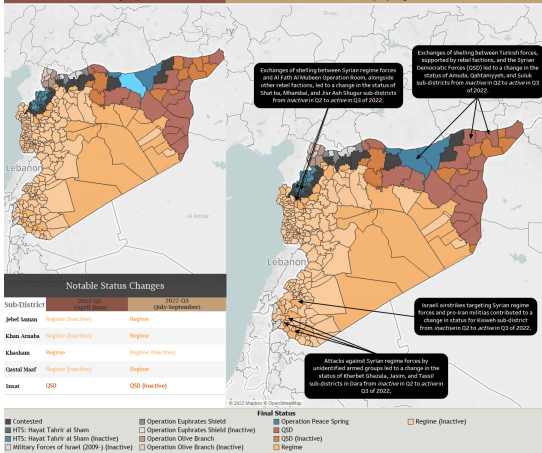
The State of Syria

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.



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- 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?