



Civil Wars Continued

Steven Saroka

POLI 150

20 February 2024



Announcements

- NO CLASS Feb. 22 and 29.
- Subject pool module 1 open from Feb. 21 until Mar. 6.
Module 2 open from Mar. 27 until Apr. 10. For more information see [the PSSP site](#) or email pssp@unc.edu.
Failure to complete the research requirement will result in a grade of IN for the course.



Announcements Cont'd

- Exam 1 on March 7.
- 15-20 multiple choice questions. Open-note, open-book, time limit of 1 hour and 15 minutes.
- Opens at 12:01 AM on the 7th, and closes at 11:59 PM.
- Covers all topics through “Terrorism and Counterterrorism”
- No class that day; exam can be taken from anywhere with Internet connection.



Today's Class

- Civilian Victimization in Civil Wars
- Rebel Ideology
- Walter 2017 Review
- How Civil Wars End



Key Terms

- Selective violence
- Indiscriminate violence
- Three waves of civil wars
- Insurgency
- Counterinsurgency



Central Question 1

What drives violence against civilians in civil wars?



Background: Nepalese Civil War

- Conflict from 1996-2006 between Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and government of Nepal.
- Concluded with peace accords in 2006.
- Over 17,000 deaths and substantial violations of civil and human rights.



Civilian Targeting in Nepal

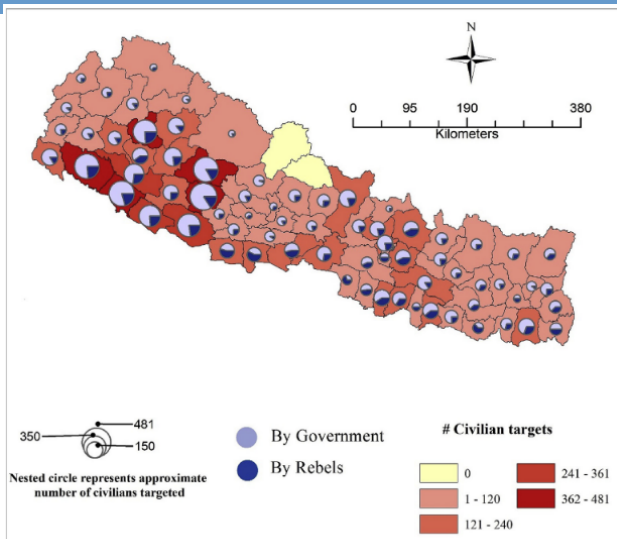


Fig. 2. Spatial distribution of civilians targeted in non-combat during the Maoist insurgency in Nepal.



Civilians and Civil War

- This conflict illustrates that civilian targeting was committed by both sides throughout the conflict.
- This means it was a systemic feature of the conflict.
- Civil wars, arguably more than other kinds of war, can incentivize civilian victimization. Why?
- **The civilian population is inextricably linked to the conflict.**



Civilians and Civil War

Civilians, in many ways, are caught between (at least) two competing forces in any civil war.

- Rebels use the civilian population to conceal themselves, which may involve coercion.
- Rebels may also draw support from the civilian population, such as food or currency.
- Without a supply of foreign fighters, rebels also must recruit from the population. Recruitment may be forced.
- Rival rebel groups may demand civilians aid them, creating mutually incompatible demands.



Civilians and Civil War

Civilians, in many ways, are caught between (at least) two competing forces in any civil war.

- State forces know that the rebels are hiding in the civilian population.
- States experiencing civil war tend to have lower state capacity, which impacts the state's ability to gather intelligence on rebel membership.
- In most cases, state forces struggle to distinguish between true civilians and rebels, which may lead them to target civilians mistakenly.
- State forces may also attempt to collectively punish civilians for their (alleged) support of the rebels.



Civilians and Civil War

- Violence against civilians can be either **selective** or **indiscriminate**, and committed by either or both rebels and government forces.
- What motivates where and when this violence occurs?



Kalyvas' *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (2006) is a foundational examination of the subject.

- Civil wars create **fractured sovereignty**: rebels and government forces each control different areas.
- Each side faces an **identification problem**: both the state and the rebels want to find and eliminate informants for the other side that are hiding in their territory (as well as rebels hiding in the population).
- In areas held by the rebels, these informants will pass information to the state.
- In areas held by the state, these informants will pass information to the rebels.



- The civilian population, generally, will cooperate with whoever is currently in control of their territory.
 - Informants come from the civilian population, but not all civilians are informants.
- Territorial control requires a credible armed presence by an actor.
- **Civilian informants will only collaborate with a given side as long as they believe there is a strong likelihood that they will be punished for helping the other side (“defection”).**



- Different levels of control of an area impact collaboration and defection.
- Higher levels of control lead to higher (lower) levels of collaboration (defection) by the population that lives there.
- Generally, this means rebels hold rural areas while state holds urban ones.
- **Different levels of territorial control predict different types of violence.**



- **Selective violence** is only effective when an actor has the information to target their enemies precisely.
- This information comes from civilian informants, who will only provide this information to a side if they believe that side is strong enough to shield them from retaliation.
 - Another way to say this is that they will only denounce side A's supporters when side B convincingly controls their territory.



Logic of Violence

- **Indiscriminate violence** is most effective when used against populations that support the opposing side.
- Why ever use indiscriminate violence? If actors lack information to precisely target their violence against supporters of the opposing side (selective violence), they instead attack populations in which they suspect those supporters are hiding.



Logic of Violence

- **Selective violence** is expected in those areas where a side has dominant but not complete control, as information from denunciation enables direct targeting of supporters of the opposing side.
- **Indiscriminate violence** is expected in the areas in which an organization has no foothold, as it is unlikely to harm its own supporters.
- The least amount of violence will occur where both sides have equal power, as neither will be able to shield their informants from retaliation, so no selective violence will occur due to lack of information, while indiscriminate violence would harm their own supporters.



Kalyvas' model is foundational, but subsequent research has expanded on it.

- Rebel groups may rationally consider the impact of indiscriminate violence on both domestic and international support.
- Rebel groups may be less likely to victimize civilians if they are especially dependent on local resources.
- Not entirely clear that these accounts explain all violence against civilians in civil wars, especially performative or sexual violence.



Central Question 2

Does a rebel group's ideology matter?



What about ideology and identity? Thus far, we've treated all rebel groups as identical in this regard, but what if they are not?

- **Ideology** here encompasses whatever set of normative frameworks a group uses.
 - Religion, political ideology, ethnic or tribal group solidarity, etc.
- Some research has argued that ideology type does not really matter.
- More recently, scholars have noticed a disproportionately high representation of Islamist groups in cases of religious civil war.



Rebels and Ideology

- This has been explained by essentially arguing that religion, in general, is a very effective tool for mobilization.
- Religion is effective at solving:
 - Collective action problems
 - Principal-agent problems
 - Commitment problems
 - Generally securing resources and support for the group
- This brings us to today's reading...



Walter provides an overview of civil war trends and how these conflicts have been theorized.

- 1 **First wave:** occurred during the Cold War, with civil wars usually breaking along class lines, and substantial superpower funding and support for either or both sides.
- 2 **Second wave:** lasted from the end of the Cold War to 2003. Civil wars here tended to occur along ethnic separatist lines, with lots of negotiated settlements.
- 3 **Third wave:** 2003-present. Characterized by radical Islamist rebels, frequently with transnational aims.



This third wave has some notable characteristics:

- Rebels tended to be radical *compared to the average view of their host societies*.
 - Many of these radical Islamist groups arose in cultures that were already quite Islamic (compared to the West), but the puzzling question was why these groups adopted more extreme views.
- Transnational aims were also puzzling: given how rarely rebels win outright victory, how could they expect to do something like create a new caliphate out of parts of several existing states?



- Walter argues that this third wave is the first to be fought after the establishment of the modern Internet as we know it.
- The connections enabled by the Internet (and later, social media) means that rebels can:
 - Spread their own propaganda photos and videos
 - Deny state propaganda
 - Network with like-minded sympathizers
 - Recruit and fund via a global support base
- ISIS was not the first, but arguably was the most sophisticated.



Online Propaganda Examples





Online Propaganda Examples





Central Question 3

What tactics do rebels use?



Civil War Tactics: Rebels

- Islamic State's swift, massive territorial gains are not typical of most rebel groups.
- A majority of civil wars involve **asymmetric power**, where the state tends to outnumber and outgun the rebels.
- This means that rebels frequently use a strategy of **insurgency**, in which small lightly-armed units engage in hit-and-run attacks.
- This strategy does not involve holding (much) territory, making it suited for smaller, weaker groups.



Civil War Tactics: Rebels

- The goal of insurgency is to undermine confidence in the state government, and can provoke indiscriminate violence by the state, which increases the rebel recruitment pool.
- Rebels blend into a civilian population, making them hard to find.
- Endemic commitment problems incentivize rebels to keep fighting even if victory is unlikely.



Civil War Tactics: The State

- One option for countering insurgency is **indiscriminate violence** by the state.
- This can occur for multiple reasons:
 - State attempts to intimidate civilians into withholding support for rebels via reprisals.
 - State attempts to remove rebel support by removing civilians.
 - State lacks information on rebels and its attempts at selective violence actually feel indiscriminate to the population.

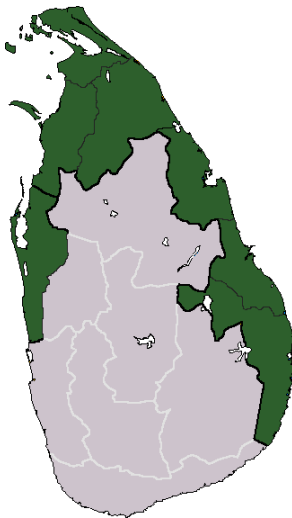


Sri Lanka and the LTTE

- **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam:** Tamil separatist rebel movement located in northeastern Sri Lanka.
- Goal: independent state for Hindu Tamils, located in northeastern Sri Lanka.
- Formed in 1972 and carried out its first attack in 1983.
- Notable for extensive and skilled use of suicide bombing, as well as their resemblance of a conventional military in their organization.



LTTE Territory





LTTE Collapse

- Despite their multi-decade group survival and skill in insurgency, LTTE was militarily defeated in 2009.
- This military victory was possible in part due to a reckless disregard by state forces for civilian lives in LTTE-held provinces.
- LTTE was conclusively defeated, but at the cost of massive human rights violations due to indiscriminate violence by the state.



- Another option is **counter-insurgency (COIN)**: a “hearts and minds” approach that focuses on winning population loyalty through providing security and services, decreasing rebel support.
- US and coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan turned to COIN in an effort to address the ongoing insurgency.

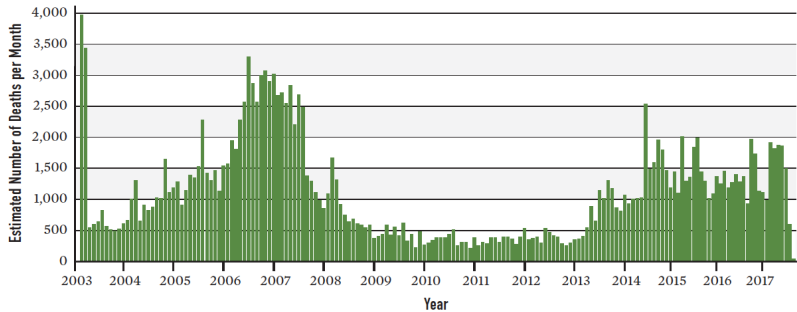


COIN in Iraq





COIN in Iraq





So, did the COIN strategy work? Not really, but...

- COIN required **massive** amounts of troops and resources - more than US policymakers were often willing to provide.
- US troops were hindered by cultural barriers; attempts to address these came too late.
- Decreasing domestic US support for these wars prevented the kind of long-term engagement with local populations required to make COIN truly effective.
- US state-building failures further compounded these problems.



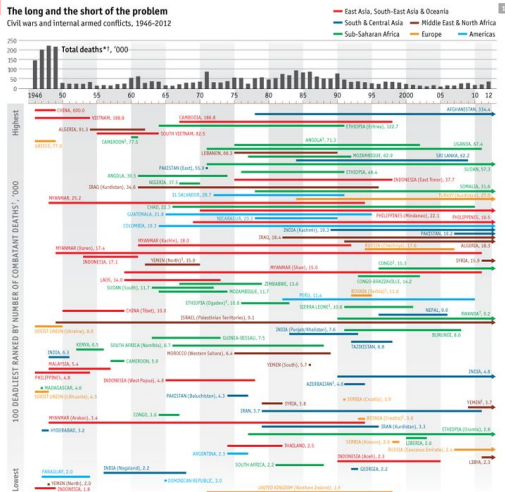
Central Question 4

Why do civil wars last so long?



Why Do Civil Wars Last So Long?

The long and the short of the problem
Civil wars and internal armed conflicts, 1946-2012



Sources: PRIO; Uppsala University

*Based on over 250 conflicts, 1946-2012. †Deaths in battle of government troops and troops of politically organized rebels; conflicts restarted within 10 years counted as continuous. ‡Excluding foreign intervention



Why Do Civil Wars Last So Long?

- Average civil war lasts 6-7 years, and some last much longer. Why?
- Rebels are aware of their weakness compared to the state, and use insurgency tactics to avoid open battles where the state can use its greater strengths.
- State may struggle to find rebels, especially with a supportive population.
- Disarmament commitment problems incentivize rebels to keep fighting rather than risk being defenseless.



How Does a Civil War End?

- Historically, most civil wars end in a victory for one side or a negotiated settlement.
- If a civil war ended in a victory, *usually* it was a victory for state forces.
- Negotiated settlements became more common in the 1990s, likely due to increased UNSC willingness to intervene by providing peacekeeping forces.



How Does a Civil War End?

International institutions can help negotiated settlements in a number of ways.

- Intervention to impose costs on actors using force is tough (peace enforcement).
- However, maintaining peace following the cessation of violence has been possible (peacekeeping).
- Peacekeepers can solve commitment problems by monitoring agreements and warning about renewed aggression. Neutral third parties can provide security for disarmed rebels.
- Encouraging development of domestic institutions is the best way to prevent civil conflict in the first place, but is difficult in practice.