

The Politics of Civil Wars

Political Science 390

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2pm to 3:20pm

Venue: 555 Clark

Will Reno

www.willreno.org reno-at-northwestern-dot-edu

& other contacts supplied in class

Course description: This course is about domestic political conflicts that take the form of armed confrontation. By the 1970s these wars within states, or what will be referred to in this class as civil wars, had become the world's dominant form of warfare, outpacing inter-state wars in their numbers. These conflicts are notable for their intensities and their durations. The death toll from Congo's conflict from 1996 has been estimated by various agencies to number in the millions. Sudan's wars also have killed millions, most recently in Darfur, just one of several conflicts that have plagued that country since the mid-1960s. Somalia has the distinction of lacking an effective central government since 1991, in part a consequence of continued fighting between different armed groups there. Elements of civil wars also have appeared in inter-state wars, such as in the wake of the American-led attack on the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq in 2003 and against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001.

Many of these wars have involved armed struggles between state forces and rebels over the control of territory and the right to form the central government. Phenomena such as ethnic conflicts and rebellions also make an appearance. These developments in their contexts of domestic armed struggles will be considered in this course as categories of civil wars. Civil wars also can include armed actors such as ethnic militias, vigilante groups, foreign mercenaries, and criminal gangs. A key observation in this course, however, is that very few recent and contemporary civil wars involve clashes between hierarchically organized militaries. Instead, they involve varying—but almost always significant—degrees of irregular warfare. (See William Safire's [comments](#) on this lamentably vague but important term.)

The aim of this course is to understand the different causes and paths of civil wars in the present and in recent decades. The first segment of this course will consider several prominent academic theories about the causes of civil wars. These theories range from the economist's analysis that an abundance of natural resources and other economic opportunities provide incentives for rebellion to enterprising individuals, to the idea derived from international relations that "security dilemmas" (the mutual fear that one's neighbors are preparing to strike, thus prompting all to prepare for war) cause civil wars, and to the investigation of how changes in the global structure of economies and politics are at the roots of many civil wars. The second segment of this course will focus on the processes of war fighting in civil wars. Students will find that the explanations of causes of civil wars, while of varying applicability from one case to the next, prove to be quite valuable in terms of generating questions and in turning attention to particular kinds of relationships. This section will include consideration of processes such as the formation of leadership, the formulation of ideologies and political programs (or their absence), and recruitment of fighters and supporters. The heart of the consideration of process, however, merits a section of its own. In this third section, we will consider the special role of violence in influencing the courses of these other processes and relationships.

Course requirements and grading: Students are required to complete all of the following required assignments to be eligible in order to receive a passing grade in this course. The relative weight of each assignment is as follows:

Participation / attendance	10%	
A midterm exam	25%	Administered 28 Oct in class
A final exam	30%	Administered 10 Dec, 9:00 to 11:00
A paper about 10 pages	30%	Due in class on 23 Nov

Participation / attendance can be satisfied with regular attendance and observable evidence of having read assignments, etc. Failure to show up for class, particularly one that meets in the middle of the afternoon, will have a negative impact on evaluation. The midterm exam will be short answer and essay format and will be administered in class. I will provide further details in the days prior. The final exam will be comprehensive, with a bias toward material from the second half of the course. This will be administered during the regular two hour scheduled final exam period on Friday, 10 December.

The paper is due at the end of the last class on the 23 November. This paper should be about ten pages. The topic of the paper is negotiable, as this is a fairly small class and it can accommodate specific interests and goals of individual students. More general topics are permitted too, such as “[your name here]’s theory of violence in civil wars” or ‘globalization and civil wars—the real deal”. Third year students might want to use this paper to develop an undergraduate research grant proposal, and it can be tailored to this task. Fourth year students may set sights on bigger fellowships and grants if that is one’s aim. These and other “synergies” are encouraged, provided that the topic of the paper rests squarely in the topics and analytical considerations associated with this class. In analytical terms, there is not a “correct answer” that is required for this paper. Rather, evaluation will be based upon the coherence of argument and presentation of supporting evidence against at least one other reasonable alternative. Readings from class may be used to provide data and other information to be incorporated into this argument. Students are free to consult work outside of the assigned readings. As length is limited, this particular writing assignment should not evolve into a major research project.

Books for purchase: The following required texts for this class are available at Beck’s Bookstore, located at 716 Clark St and at <http://www.becksbooks.com/textbook/northwestern-university-home>

Mary Kaldor (2007) *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* [2nd edition], Stanford: Stanford University Press, ISBN 978-0804756464 [paperback]

Christoph Zürcher (2009) *Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Caucasus*, New York: NYU Press., ISBN 978-0814797242 [paperback]

Articles, reports and other materials that are not included in these two books will be available at the password protected Blackboard site that is accessible to all registered students. The exceptions to this will be materials that are available through web links noted on the syllabus and materials that will be made available in the classroom.

CLASS CALENDAR

21 September: What are civil wars and how common are they? [A discussion in the first class meeting]

Basic Causal Approaches to Understanding Civil Wars

23 September: Does greed cause people to fight?

Paul Collier (2000) "Rebellion as a Quasi-criminal Activity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44:6, 839-53.

Michael Ross (2004) "What Do We Know about Natural Resources and Civil Wars?" *Journal of Peace Research*, 41:3 (Summer), 337-56, [available here](#).

28 September: Does fear cause people to fight?

Jack Snyder & Robert Jervis (1999) "Civil War and the Security Dilemma," in Barbara Walter & Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insurgency, and Intervention*, Columbia, 15-37.

30 September: Does "globalization" cause people to fight? A look at the politics of "new wars" and a case study of the Bosnian war

Mary Kaldor (2007) *New & Old Wars*, 1-94.

5 October: Further consideration of new wars, with attention to the globalized war economy: Do global changes weaken the state and make rebellion easier, or do global changes make rebels stronger, or both?

Mary Kaldor (2007) *New & Old Wars*, 95-149.

7 October: New wars and the relevance of this analysis to the war in Iraq. A counterpoint: Are "new" wars really that new?

Mary Kaldor (2007) *New & Old Wars*, 149-193.

Stathis Kalyvas (2001) "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" *World Politics* 54:1 (Oct), 99-118, [available here](#).

Some Process Oriented Approaches to Understanding Civil Wars

12 October: Leadership: How do the experiences and associations of prewar social networks shape how rebel groups form, how resources are acquired, and how violence is used? Does ideology matter, or are leaders simply opportunists? Should the wars of Soviet (and Yugoslav) dissolution be seen as a distinct category of civil wars?

Christoph Zürcher (2009) *Post-Soviet Wars*, 1-69.

14 October: Leadership and institutions: How did Soviet institutions that were designed to contain nationalist elite ambitions instead become “subversive institutions” in the cause of secession? Post-Soviet wars in Chechnya, Georgia, and Karabakh

Christoph Zürcher (2009) *Post-Soviet Wars*, 70-185.

19 October: Testing the findings: Post-Soviet Wars, the ones that did not happen (and why). Does elite continuity and patronage politics (often seen as undesirable from the point of view of reformers) help to prevent the outbreak of civil war?

Christoph Zürcher (2009) *Post-Soviet Wars*, 186-230.

21 October: Ideology and discipline: Why are ideologies and political programs prominent in some civil wars and notably absent in others? How is ideology and political program associated with the nature of leadership? What is the impact of ideologies on rebel administration of non-combatants?

James Scott (1979) “Revolution in the Revolution; Peasants and Commissars,” *Theory & Society*, 7:11 (November), 97-134.

Ibrahim Abdullah & Patrick Muana (1998) “The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone,” in Christopher Clapham, ed., *African Guerrillas*, Oxford; James Currey, 172-93.

In class: professor’s videos of Sudan People’s Liberation Army operations (liberation of Torit)

26 October Recruitment: To what extent does recruitment reflect preexisting popular attitudes and allegiances? Or is recruitment (and personal allegiances) a consequence of war, or at least radically altered by war? What do the essays below contribute to our understanding about causes of civil wars?

Tom Coghlin (2009) “The Taliban in Helmand Province: An Oral History” in Antonio Guistozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, New York: Columbia U. Press, 119-53.

Jacob Shapiro & C Christine Fair (2010) “Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan,” *International Security*, 34:3 (Winter), 79-118.

28 October:

Midterm Exam [administered in class]

2 November: Recruitment II: What accounts for the radically different recruitment techniques explored in these two essays?

Nelson Kasfir (2005) "Guerrillas and Civilian Participation: The National Resistance Army in Uganda," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 43: 2 (April), 271-96.

Rachel Brett & Irma Specht (2004) "The Life of the Prospective Volunteer" and "The Critical Moment," in their *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight?* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 39-76.

Focus: Violence and Civil Wars

4 November: Violence and information: How do combatant forces identify friend from foe or from fence-sitter? How does violence shape the non-combatant's perception of options? How do fears of betrayal and uncertainties about loyalties shape the application of violence and influence the internal politics and organization of rebels (and other armed groups).

Stathis Kalyvas (2006) "A Theory of Irregular War I" in his *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge U Press, 87-110.

9 November: Violence and physical control of territory and of people: the importance of collaboration. Is control best sought through intimidation or through administration of populations? What determines the choice that rebels make in this matter? Is control to be sought through discriminate violence or through indiscriminate violence? These are questions for rebels and for counterinsurgents.

Stathis Kalyvas (2006) "A Theory of Irregular War II" in his *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge U Press, 111-45.

Students who wish to pursue issues related to this section in greater depth are encouraged to purchase Stathis Kalyvas's landmark classic, *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, ISBN 978-0521670043.

11 November: Violence as communication; strategic and tactical considerations

Ernesto [Che] Guevara (1963) "Guerrilla Warfare: A Method," [15 pages]

Robert Pape (2003) "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review*, 97: 3 (August), 1-19.

In class: An analysis of recent suicide bombing trends in Afghanistan

16 November: Civil wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: Violence as a form of communication and the role of perception. Which is more important, the deed or the perception of the deed? Applying the lessons of violence to the study of 'the Surge' in Iraq.

Bing West (2008) "The Sunnis Change Sides" and "Victory in Anbar" in his *Strongest Tribe: war, Politics and the Endgame in Iraq*, NY: Random House, 224-45 and 280-92.

Supporting materials:

Capt. Travis Patriquin (no date) "How to Win the war in Al Anbar" [Powerpoint in class]

Al Jazeera clips, "[American Bombing](#) of Civilians in Fallujah" and "[Haditha Massacre](#) Witness."

TheFightingMarines, "[Combat Footage](#) of US Marines in Fallujah"

18 November: Americans fighting in civil wars The US military fighting in the context of irregular warfare: A view from the perspective of how US Forces think about and teach about these issues. What is the difference between intelligence and information? Putting the individual in the position of having to make decisions about who is an enemy and other critical battlefield decisions.

Steve Metz (2007) *Rethinking Insurgency*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College [76 pages]

Supporting materials:

Burn it Down: Planning a Raid on a Baghdad Mosque, Center for Complex Operations [Training Video]

After Action Reviews and Intro to Virtual Battlespace 2

23 November: What do we know about civil wars? How does this knowledge play out in civil wars in Afghanistan and in Pakistan?

TBD: Assignment will be determined by developments

Those with more interest in these debates may want to visit the resources section of my [syllabus](#) "The Politics of War in Iraq and Afghanistan".

WCAS Reading Period begins on Monday, 29 November. Exam week begins on Monday, 6 December. The final exam for this class will be held on **Friday, 10 December from 9am to 11am**. The exam will be administered in the course classroom at 555 Clark.