

# **Civil Wars and the State**

## **Political Science 101 – First Year Seminar**

Fall 2014

William Reno

Mondays & Wednesdays, 4pm to 5:20pm  
Program of African Studies Seminar Room

### **Overview**

This course is about violent domestic political conflicts. By the 1970s wars within states—civil wars—had become the world’s dominant form of warfare. These conflicts attract attention for their intensities and durations. Elements of civil wars also appeared in inter-state wars, such as in the wake of the American-led attack on Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq in 2003 and against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. These wars have involved armed struggles between state forces and rebels to control of territory and to govern communities. But armed actors in civil wars reflect many agendas and include ethnic militias, vigilante groups, foreign mercenaries, and criminal gangs. A key observation in this course is that these multiple agendas and dynamics—“wars within wars”—play important roles in recent and ongoing civil wars. This development is more prominent than in most civil wars through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Though these wars also included complex arrays of armed groups and agenda, they tended to feature more clear-cut distinctions between state and rebel combatants. The causes and significance of this change will constitute one of the themes for discussion in this seminar.

The first segment of this seminar focuses on theories about the causes of civil wars. These 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” (mutual fears that neighbors are preparing to strike) cause civil wars, and to the investigation of how changes in global economies and politics drive conflicts. The second segment of this seminar will focus on the processes of war fighting in civil wars. Students will find that the explanations of what causes civil wars, while of varying applicability across cases, are valuable in terms of generating questions and in turning attention to particular kinds of relationships. This section will focus on related processes, such as the rise of leaders, the formulation of ideologies and political programs (or their absence), and recruitment of fighters and supporters. In a third section we will consider the specific role of violence in shaping these processes and relationships.

### **Course Requirements**

Students are required to complete all required assignments to be eligible for a passing grade in this course. The relative weight of each assignment is as follows:

Participation	10%
Three essays (~ 5-6 pages)	20% each, due on 8 Oct, 22 Oct, 10 Nov.
A final paper (~ 8-10 pages)	30% Due by “class” on 26 Nov

Participation means showing up for class and exhibiting evidence of having read assignments. Failure to show up for class, particularly one that meets in the middle of the workday, will have a negative impact on evaluation.

The essays will be due in class on 8 Oct, 22 Oct, and 10 Nov. These should be about 5-6 pages in length. Students will be provided with a selection of topic questions that are derived from readings and seminar discussions. Students may opt to construct their own topic questions in consultation with the instructor.

The final paper will be more comprehensive in nature. Again, guidance will be provided well in advance of the 26 November due date. This paper is due at the last class on the 26 November. This paper should be 8-10 pages in length. The topic of the paper is negotiable and can accommodate specific interests and goals of individual students. More general topics are permitted, such as “[your name here]’s theory of violence in civil wars” or “globalization and civil wars—the real deal”. In analytical terms, there is no “correct answer” that is required for this paper. 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 welcome to consult work outside of the assigned readings, but the focus really should be on course material and this writing assignment ought not evolve into a major research project.

## **Required Textbooks**

The following three required textbooks are available on-line in new & used condition.

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* [3<sup>rd</sup> edition]. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. ISBN 978-0804785495.

Lidwein Kapteijns (2013) *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*. University of Pennsylvania Press. ISBN 978-0-8122-2319-4.

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn: American Soldiers’ Counterinsurgency in Iraq*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing. ISBN 978-1616086176.

## **Class Schedule**

### **Part I: The Concept of Civil War in History and Efforts to Identify the Basic Causes of Civil Wars**

**September 24:** Introduction to the general concept and approaches to the study of civil wars. What is a civil war and how many of them are currently underway? Are civil wars increasing or decreasing in frequency? How do we know?

Stathis Kalyvas (2007) "Civil Wars" in Carles Boix & Susan Stokes, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 416-34. This short essay should be read early in the term and is available [here](#).

**September 29:** Consider how the nature of civil wars changed (or not changed) over time. Do all civil wars contain a 'new war' element? What do you think will be the nature of civil wars in the future?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars* [textbook], chapters "Introduction" and "Old Wars", 1-32.

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

**October 1:** A "new war" explained? Warfighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s. How broadly applicable is the "new war" category? Is Mexico currently experiencing a "new war" type of civil war or just a really bad crime wave?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, chapters "Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Case Study of a New War" and "The Politics of New Wars," 33-94.

William Finnegan (2012) "Letter from Mexico: The Kingpins, the Fight for Guadalajara," (2 July), available [here](#).

**October 6:** Economic explanations of civil war onset and continuation: Is greed and / or relatively easy opportunities to rebel responsible for civil war onset? Are civil wars of this sort a more recent phenomenon?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, "The Globalized War Economy," 95-118.

Paul Collier (2000) "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44 (Dec), 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](#).

**October 8:** Ethnic mobilization and the role of reciprocal fears of attack responsible for the onset and continuation of civil wars? Can one attribute most civil wars to the manipulations of enterprising political actors or is there need to be an underlying societal narrative of grievance or aggression?

Charles King (2004) "The Micropolitics of Social Violence," *World Politics*, 56:3 (April), 431-55, available [here](#).

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.

- **First essay due in class**

**October 13:** State weakness as a cause of civil wars. Are civil wars following state breakdown a new phenomenon? How does a rationalist explanation for state weakness as a cause of civil wars differ from Lidwein Kapteijn's culturally contextualized explanation? Are "civil wars of state weakness" an African phenomenon or are they more widely observable? What does the answer to that question say about the role of global structures alongside local situations?

Lidwein Kapteijns (2013) *Clan Cleansing*, [textbook], "Introduction" and "Somali Poets and Novelists on Civil War Violence," 1-70.

James Fearon & David Laitin (2003) "Ethnicity, Insurgency & Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, 97:1 (Feb), 75-90, available [here](#).

**October 15:** Continued Discussion of L. Kapteijn's book: What is the relationship of state weakness to the ground-level processes during and prior to the Somali conflict? Is this an example of the weakness of state capacity or alternative to state capacity? Is there an identifiable "tipping point" in this conflict?

Lidwein Kapteijns (2013) *Clan Cleansing*, "Historical Background," 71-129.

**October 20:** What is the difference between the proposition that clans kill and the proposition that individuals kill in the name of clans? What is the practical impact of violence on the options available to individuals? Is a discussion of past violence a necessary condition to end conflict or is it a factor likely to lead to continued conflict?

Lidwein Kapteijns (2013) *Clan Cleansing*, "Clan Cleaning in Mogadishu and Beyond," 131-91.

Jack Snyder & Leslie Vinjamuri (2003) "Trials and Errors: Principle and Pragmatism in Strategies of International Justice," *International Security*, 28:3 (Winter), 5-44.

**October 22:** What did the perpetrators of clan-based violence against civilians expect to achieve? What was the role of discourses of violence? How did discourses of victimization get assimilated into political action? Does Islamism and nationalist identity represent a pathway out of this situation?

Lidwein Kapteijns (2013) *Clan Cleansing*, "The Why and How of Clan Cleansing," 192-240.

- **Second essay due in class**

## Part II: Wars within Wars in Iraq: The Complexity of Armed Groups and their Behaviors

**October 27:** examine the relationships that exist between insurgents, counterinsurgents and the people. How do insurgents use people in tactical ways? What is the relationship between narrative / ideology and the reasons why people support insurgents?

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, [textbook], 11-100.

**October 29:** This section also examines relationships between insurgents and civilian populations. How do people choose whom to support and to what intensity? What is “subversion”? Note the relationships between armed groups; how some piggyback on others. How do the jihadist insurgents build their organizations? This section of the reading also gives particular note to how control over flows of information about acts of violence—what information is propagated and what information is hidden—shapes the battlespace.

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, 103-210.

**November 3:** the limits of violence and the limits of control through fear. Why do the jihadists miscalculate in their enterprise? Note the distinctions between suicide fighters and suicide bombers and the different tactical and strategic uses of violence.

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, 211-96.

Look over 18 USC § 2441 ([War Crimes Act](#))

**November 5:** Inside the Shia insurgency: How was this insurgency different from the war in Sunni provinces? How is conflict in an urban setting different from conflict in rural settings? Does this kind of urban warfare confirm / not confirm the ‘new wars’ thesis encountered earlier in this course? How do rules of engagement affect the character of warfare? What should one make of developments in Iraq after the 2011 American withdrawal?

J.B Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, 299-396.

Patrick Cockburn (2014), “[ISIS Consolidates](#),” *London Review of Books*, 21 Aug, 3-5.

**November 10:** Some general lessons: What is the nature of subversion when rebel forces are close to government institutions, versus subversion as a practice among political outsiders? How do the people figure into these different categories of conflict? Is subversion from inside particularly associated with civil wars in the context of state collapse? Is this becoming a more common kind of civil war dynamic?

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, the rest of the book.

Jon Lee Anderson (2014) “[The Men Who Killed James Foley](#),” *New Yorker*, 20 Aug.

Matthew Schweitzer (2014) "[As Iraq Implodes](#), Violence Threatens," *Le Monde diplomatique*, 5 Aug.

- **Third essay due in class**

### **Part III: More Perspectives on the Organization of Armed Groups and the Logic of Violence**

**November 12:** A framework for analyzing the role of violence and information in the course of civil wars. Do civilians in civil wars act without regard to preferences for particular ideologies or political narratives? What role does violence play in armed group choices about organizational strategies?

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

Theo Farrell & Antonio Giustozzi (2013) "The Taliban at War: Inside the Helmand Insurgency, 2004-2012," *International Affairs*, 89:4 (July), 845-71, available [here](#) if you are using a campus ISP.

Gary Anderson (2014) "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Theory and Practice of Jihad," *Small Wars Journal*, (12 Aug), available [here](#). Also watch Vice News' [Islamic State](#) video.

**November 17:** Violence and territorial control: Is territorial control the ultimate aim of all armed groups in civil wars or is this an outdated concept from the Maoist civil wars of the mid-twentieth century? How would one apply this framework to civil wars in West Africa (Hoffman) or to other civil wars studied in this class?

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

Mao Tse-tung (1937) "[On Guerrilla Warfare](#)," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol IX*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press.

**November 19:** Violence as mode of communication in varied geographic and demographic contexts: the variable tactics of communication through violence and their impacts on the course of conflicts.

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

Carlos Marighela (1969) [Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla](#) [about 40 pages]

**November 24:** Are civil wars just the remnants of what used to be inter-state wars? Has violent conflict simply been confined to the peripheries of global society, symptoms of the collapse of some of these states?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, “Cosmopolitan Approach,” 119-49.

Azar Gat (2013) “Is War Declining—and Why?” *Journal of Peace Research*, 50:2 (March), 149–157, available [here](#) [with campus ISP].

**November 26:** Officially class is held on this day, but as any reasonable person realizes, it would be futile to try to hold a session that begins at 4pm on the day before the Thanksgiving holiday. That’s just acknowledging the stark fist of reality.

**Final Papers due in “class,”** which in practical terms means that they need to be submitted to the instructor via email by 4pm.