

# **POLITICS OF CIVIL WARS**

## **Political Science 376 / African Studies 390**

Fall 2018

Lectures by William Reno

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 15:30 to 16:50

555 Clark, B01

### **Overview**

Scholars typically depict internal or “civil” wars as wars in which rebels fight a government, in contrast to inter-state wars in which armies of two or more states wage war. But all wars involve multiple layers of conflict, incorporating a variety of often clashing, agendas. This course will focus on these layers where the locus of conflict is within the state. Thus internal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been associated with US-led attacks in the 2000s to overthrow their governments. Internal wars can include wars in places where formal state authority breaks down, such as in Somalia since the collapse of the central government in 1991 and breakdowns of government capacity in Iraq after the 2011 US withdrawal as militias under the control of local politicians and strongmen overshadowed the national army. In Libya, Yemen and some conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, national armies act like the militias with which and against which they fight.

The armed actors in civil wars reflect many agendas and may include ethnic militias, vigilantes, foreign mercenaries, and criminal gangs. A key proposition in this course is that these multiple agendas and complex dynamics—“wars within wars”—occupy new roles in recent and ongoing civil wars. This development stands in contrast to civil wars through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Those wars also included complex arrays of armed groups and agendas, but they tended to feature more clear-cut distinctions between state and rebel combatants. This shift will constitute one of the themes of this course.

The first part of this course will consider theories about the causes of civil wars. These range from the idea 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 one’s neighbors pose a threat) cause civil wars, and to the investigation of how changes in the global structure of economies and politics influence civil wars. The second part of this course will focus on the specific roles of violence in the processes of conflict. Students will find that the explanations of causes of civil wars, while of varying applicability from one case to the next, are useful for generating questions and drawing attention to particular kinds of relationships. This section will focus on 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 part we will consider the special role of violence in influencing the courses of these other processes and relationships.

## Course Requirements

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

Participation	10%	(See note below)
Two memos	30%	(15% each) Due 18 October & 13 November
A midterm exam	25%	Administered in class on 23 October
A paper (~ 10 pages)	35%	Due 29 November, in class

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 midterm exam will be an essay format exercise administered in class. Details will be provided before the exam day, Tuesday, 23 October. The two memos require the student to identify and critically engage a key idea in one of the readings encountered in class readings up to that point. These memos should be about 4 pages in length.

The paper is due at the last class (29 November). This paper should be about 10 pages. The paper's topic is negotiable and can accommodate interests and goals of individual students. More general topics are permitted, i.e., "My [meaning your] theory of violence in civil wars" or "globalization and civil wars—the real story". Third year students might use this paper to develop an undergraduate research grant proposal. Fourth year students may set sights on bigger fellowships and grants. These and other "synergies" are encouraged, provided that the topic of the paper is in dialogue with issues and analytical considerations associated with this class. Evaluation will be based upon the coherence of argument and presentation of supporting evidence against at least one reasonable alternative. Readings from class may be used to provide data and other information to make an argument. Students are welcome to consult work beyond the assigned readings. As length is limited, this assignment should not spiral into a major research project.

## Required Readings

The following three required textbooks are available at various purveyors on the web. These should be available as reasonably priced used copies. Other readings are available at the course Canvas site. The instructor will have handouts from time to time.

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

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.

**Big trigger warning:** Materials for this course, which is a course about war, may contain graphic imagery of war and political views that some may find objectionable. All reasonable efforts will be made to warn students of particular content.

## Class Schedule

### Part I: Considering the Historical Evolution of the Concept of “Civil War” and the Search for Basic Causes of Civil Wars

**September 27:** 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 is available [here](#).

**October 2:** Consider how the nature of civil wars changed (or not changed) over time. Is the distinction between new and old wars valid? Does it matter for Kaldor’s argument if wars of old have elements of the new embedded within them?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars* [textbook], chapters “Introduction” and “Old Wars”, 1-31.

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

**October 4:** A “new war” explained? Kaldor examines the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. What are the analytical consequences of explaining at B-H from a ground-level vs a macro-structural level? How broadly applicable is the “new war” category? Has Mexico been experiencing a “new war” type of civil war or is this a really bad crime wave, or is this violence a signal of something else?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, chapters “Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Case Study of a New War” and “The Politics of New Wars,” 32-93.

Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk (2017) *Drug Violence in Mexico*, San Diego: Justice in Mexico Project, available [here](#).

**October 9:** Economic explanations of civil war onset and continuation: Is greed and / or lower barriers to rebellion responsible for civil war onset? How rational are individuals' behavior in the context of civil war violence? Are civil wars centered on control of illicit commerce a new phenomenon?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, "The Globalized War Economy," 94-118.

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

Mark Shaw (2015) "Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: the Evolution of an Elite Protection Network," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53: 3 (Sept), 339-364.

**October 11:** 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? When does an ethnic category become "real" and how durable is it?

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.

**October 16:** State weakness as a cause of civil wars: Are civil wars following state breakdown a new and distinct path to civil war? How does a rationalist explanation for state weakness as a cause of civil wars differ from Debos's culturally contextualized explanation? How does Debos define state weakness differently than Fearon & Laitin define this concept? Are "civil wars of state weakness" an African phenomenon or are they more widely observable?

Marielle Debos (2016) "Fluid Loyalties" and "Benefiting from War: The Unequal Share of War Dividends," in her *Living by the Gun in Chad: Combatants, Impunity and State Formation*, University of Chicago Press, 77-118.

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

**October 18:** What is the relationship of state weakness (if in fact “weakness” is the right word) to the ground-level processes of conflict? Is patronage politics and the exercise of authority through networks instead of bureaucracies an example of the weakness of state capacity or alternative to state capacity?

William Reno (2017) “Fictionalized States and Atomized Public Spheres: A Non-Western Approach to Fragility,” *Daedalus*, 146:4 (Fall), 139-151.

Steven Heydemann (2018) “Civil War, Economic Governance & State Reconstruction in the Arab Middle East,” *Daedalus*, 147:1 (Winter), 48-63.

**Memo Due in Class.**

**October 23:**

**Midterm Exam—in class**

**October 25:** The variable relationship of global ideas and ideologies in the development & course of civil wars. What role does local social context play? When is the liberal idea of globalism a remedy or a cause of conflict? What is the role of intervention in addressing civil war violence and its (possible) unintended consequences?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, “Cosmopolitan Approach” 119-150.

Séverine Autesserre (2014) “Constructing Knowledge of the Host Country,” in her *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and Everyday Politics of International Intervention*, Cambridge University Press, 59-113.

**Part II: Micro-dynamics of Violence and the Social Environment of Warfare—and a Focus of Civil War Violence and Counterinsurgency in Iraq**

**October 30:** The critical recurring elements of violence in civil wars. Note the roles of interactions between actors at central and local levels, and between combatants and non-combatants, and the logic of selective versus indiscriminate violence. The logic of asymmetric information, the local dynamics of violent contention, and the problem of accurate identification

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

Clay Mountcastle. 2009. "Proving Ground for Punishment: Pope, Halleck and Schofield in Missouri," in his *Punitive War: Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals*, (University of Kansas), 21-55.

**November 1:** Examine the relationships that exist between insurgents, counterinsurgents and the people. Revisiting the identification problem: 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*, 11-100.

Mary Kaldor (2012) "New Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," *New and Old Wars*, 151-84.

**November 6:** 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? Note 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 8:** What are the limits of violence and the limits of control through fear? Atrocities and the metrics of control: Do some violent extremists miscalculate in their enterprise? Note the distinctions between suicide fighters and suicide bombers and the different tactical and strategic uses of violence. How does it matter when warfighters lack access to the tools of violence that may be assessable to the insurgents?

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

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

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

**November 13:** Inside the Shia insurgency: How was this insurgency different from the war in Sunni provinces? How does conflict in urban settings differ from conflict in rural settings? Does contemporary urban warfare confirm / not confirm the 'new wars' thesis from earlier in this course? How do rules of engagement affect the character of

warfare? Think about asymmetrical warfare and the paradox of the strong becoming weaker as a consequence of fighting the weak.

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

### **Memo Due in Class**

**November 15:** General lessons: What is the nature of subversion when elements of the rebel forces are embedded in government institutions, versus subversion as a practice among political outsiders? How do the people figure into these different categories of conflict? How do warfighters behave when they are uncertain about the loyalties of others around them? Where do true loyalties lie?

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

Paul Staniland (2012) "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security*, 37:1 (Summer), 142-77.

### **Part III: The Organization of Armed Groups and the Logic of Violence— Consideration of some Contemporary Developments--Warfare in Multiple Dimensions?**

**November 20:** Narratives and mobilization: The fragmentation of the strategic narrative and the enhanced capacity of new and old actors to communicate their narratives to global audiences. Who controls the narrative and what does this mean for states that intervene in civil wars? Has the intensification of global connections changed how insurgents craft mobilizing narratives, and if so, how does that process reflect on Kaldor's argument about 'new wars'?

Emile Simpson (2012) "Strategic Narrative," and "Ethos, Vision and Confidence," *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-first Century Combat as Politics*, London: Hurst & Co., 179-226.

David Kilcullen (2009) "The Accidental Guerrilla," in his *Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1-38.

**November 27:** The logic of wartime violence in the contemporary social context. Has the logic of violence changed as the context of violence (social impacts of state collapse, global insurgent connections, urbanization) changes? Why do contemporary

jihadist rebels organize in rural areas instead of in cities? What elements of the logic of violence are consistent across history and what elements are particular to our time?

Nicholas Krohley (2015) “The Sanctions Era: Shifts in Civil Society and the Rise of the Sadrist Movement,” in his *Death of the Mehdi Army: The Rise, Fall, and the Revival of Iraq’s Most Powerful Militia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 35-57.

Hosham Dawod (2018) “Iraqi Tribes in the Land of Jihad,” in Virginie Collombier & Olivier Roy, eds., *Tribes and Global Jihadism*, London: Hurst & Co, 15-32.

**November 29:** Contemporary and recent rebel governance: Under what conditions do insurgents provide a viable alternative to state authority? Is the contemporary insurgent “liberated zone” like your grandparent’s “liberated zone”? What is the significance of rebel governance for the states that fight rebels?

Ana Arjona (2014) “Wartime Institutions: A Research Agenda,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58: 8, 1360-1389.

William Reno (2015) “Predatory Rebellions and Governance: The National Patriotic Front of Liberia,” in Arjona, Kasfir, & Mampilly, eds., *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, 265-285.

Florian Weigand (2017) “Afghanistan’s Taliban – Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists?” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:3, 1-23.

### **Final Papers due in class**

**Final Exam:** That would have been on Friday, 14 December, 12:00 to 14:00 (in 555 Clark B1—your classroom): But since this course is conducted in a seminar format, your paper & memos will serve in place of a final exam.