

Civil Wars

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Course format: 13 meetings of 3 hours each in seminar format

Description

In this advanced undergraduate seminar we'll study a small but important set of questions about civil war and discuss some innovative answers offered by political science and economics. Our schedule is spread over four topics: the consequences of civil war, the origins of civil war, explanations of the extraordinary violence in civil war, and transitions from civil war to peace. These aren't the only interesting topics to consider, but government and academia show an enduring interest in them. While our readings will take us on a tour through situations on many continents, we'll study in depth the recent conflicts in the African Great Lakes region. By the end of the course you'll be better prepared for a graduate program or job requiring a solid grasp of comparative politics, international politics and development economics.

You'll enjoy this seminar more if you've taken at least one introductory course in political science and a course on social-scientific methods. Some assigned readings contain technical matter—specifically, economic, econometric, and statistical models—but I will teach the key concepts as they arise in the readings.

Policies

Our meetings will take the form of a round-table with open, respectful and tolerant discussion. • Texting, calling, emailing and online chatting during class is prohibited. • All papers emailed to me should be in pdf format. • Auditing requires my permission.

Evaluation

Your final numerical grade will come from: short essays (58%), a term paper (30%) and attendance (12%). There are no tests. I strongly encourage your contribution to discussion during our meetings, but will not formally grade it. Short essays, the term paper and attendance involve the following:

1. Short essays: **Due by email in pdf or print before each meeting** are your answers to the questions listed below each week's readings, plus one question of your own that you think of while reading. • Each essay should be at most 4 pages. Please type and double-space them with 1-inch margins and 12 pt font. • I encourage collaboration, and if you collaborate please turn in just one essay and list your collaborators. • Each essay is worth up to 30 points and will be awarded 4 extra-credit points for collaboration.¹ I will grade each essay on the depth and originality of your written answers to each question. So, I recommend limiting each essay answer to one or two well-thought points. Try to make an important point that, in your opinion, the authors of the required readings did not consider. If you can't answer a particular question, show your work. I will deduct 3 points per page over the limit. Late essays will be penalized 5 points unless you have a family emergency or are ill. • The mean of your short essay grades will contribute 58% of your final numerical grade.
2. Term paper: this paper should outline an original contribution to one of the five topics we cover. The paper may be a theory, a constructively critical survey of the literature, a presentation of an empirical result, the design of an empirical study that will use already-collected data, or a feasible plan for an experiment, survey, ethnography or

¹E.g. a perfect score for collaborators is 34/30 points.

archival research. • **Due in print on MM/DD** is a 1-page proposal worth up to 10 points. It should sketch out an answer to the questions listed below. • **Due in print on MM/DD** is the full paper, which should count 12-20 pages excluding the bibliography, and is worth up to 90 points. • The sum of grades for the proposal and the paper will contribute 30% of your final numerical grade.

- Attendance: Each unexcused absence after our first meeting results in 1% off the absentee's grade. We have 13 meetings, so attendance contributes 12% of your final numerical grade.

Final letter grades

Your final numerical grade translates to your final course letter grade by this rule.

A	94-100	B +	86-89	B -	80-82	C	73-75	D	60-70
A -	90-93	B	83-85	C +	76-79	C -	70-72	Incomplete	< 60

Requirements for the term paper

The proposal and term paper will be graded on how well they answers the following questions:

1. *What's the motivation?* Whose mind will you change about what?

Here are some examples.

- (a) The literature doesn't ask an important question.
 - (b) A celebrated theory can't explain facts that it should explain.
 - (c) Better data reveals a startling fact that existing theories can't explain.
 - (d) Better data sheds light on a theoretical debate or opens up a "black box."
 - (e) A celebrated theory is observationally equivalent to an un-celebrated theory.
 - (f) A test supplies evidence to discriminate between competing but heretofore observationally equivalent theories.
 - (g) Two theories make contradictory predictions about the same phenomenon.
 - (h) A theory rests on unrealistic assumptions.
 - (i) A theory's logic is inconsistent.
 - (j) Prior work is over-reliant on inappropriate strategies or tools.
 - (k) Prior work makes an unambiguous, consequential mistake.
2. *What's the research question?* Given your paper's motivation, what specific question will you answer? Pose this so that you can answer it—at least approximately. This should be brief but think carefully.
 3. *What do we know?* Excluding those bits of knowledge that are inessential to answering the research question, what does the state-of-the-art in the literature teach us? Take this opportunity to resolve any confusion and clarify key concepts.
 4. *What's the strategy?* How will you answer the research question? Why did you decide to answer the question in that particular way? What assumptions must you make for this to work? Think hard about all this.
 5. *Why won't you be misled?* Could your strategy unintentionally lead you to mistaken conclusions? How could you avoid them? What is the consequence of relaxing your assumptions?

6. *How and where will you get data if you need it?* Describe any data you'll use, or alternatively, how you'll collect new data. Take this part seriously and provide citations.
7. *What are the implications?* Aside from the people whose minds you set out change, what other minds might you change once you're finished? About what? This should be brief but think carefully.

This list is not a paper outline. A rough guide for that is: summary of your contribution → brief survey of the literature → your contribution → implications.

Where to find the required readings

Most or all of the following books are required reading. I encourage you to buy copies online or at the local bookstore.

1. Séverine Autesserre. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2010.
2. Virginia Page Fortna. *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil War*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2008.
3. Stathis N. Kalyvas. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2006.
4. Jason K Stearns. *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: the Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. Public Affairs, New York, NY, 2011.
5. Monica Duffy Toft. *Securing the Peace: the Durable Settlement of Civil Wars*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2010.
6. Jeremy M. Weinstein. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2007.

Assigned chapters from books that are not listed above will be available at the course website. The easiest way to access journal articles in the required reading is to search for them on Google Scholar while you are on campus, in which case you can download them for free.

Schedule & short essay questions

DAY 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Presentation: Role of civil wars in states' development trajectories and the history of the international system.
2. Outline of future meetings and course policies.
3. Read in-class: Jack Hirshleifer. The dark side of the force. *Economic Inquiry*, 32(1):1–10, 1994.
Discussion points:
 - (a) Coase's, Pareto's and Machiavelli's notions of economic activity; Hirshleifer's synthesis.
 - (b) Aggression and cooperation as mutually reinforcing.
 - (c) Insufficiency of conflicting interests for explaining violence.
 - (d) Importance of the macro-technology of violence.
 - (e) Importance of assumptions.
4. Discuss key ideas to appear in future readings: rational choice theory, causation, confounding.

I. Consequences of civil war

Civil war seems terrible across the board, but we are only beginning to understand how it affects economies and individuals. In our meeting on 9/12 we discuss a selection from this growing literature.

DAY 2: HOW SHOULD WE ACCOUNT FOR CIVIL WAR'S EFFECT ON QUALITY-OF-LIFE?

Required readings:

1. Dirk C. Raemdonck and Paul F. Diehl. After the shooting stops: Insights on postwar economic growth. *Journal of Peace Research*, 26(3):249–264, August 1989.
2. James C. Murdoch and Todd Sandler. Civil wars and economic growth: Spatial dispersion. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(1):138–151, 2004.
3. Alberto Abadie and Javier Gardeazabal. The economic costs of conflict: A case study of the Basque Country. *American Economic Review*, 93(1):113–132, 2003.
4. Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan. The consequences of child soldiering. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 92(4):882–898, November 2010.

Short essay questions:

1. What are the most important channels by which a civil war affects the quality-of-life, broadly speaking, in the country where the war happens? Are you convinced that there war has a uni-directional effect on any outcome (i.e. expansion of government, distorted government investment, human capital, physical capital, health care, sovereign debt, investor perceptions) mentioned in the paper? Explain your reasoning. Given your explanation, how should we move this research program forward on the theoretical front? What are the implications for future empirical work?
2. Blattman & Annan, Abadie & Gardeazabal, and Murdoch & Sandler adopt very different empirical strategies for measuring the effects of civil war on quality-of-life. Why? Briefly describe each strategy and the trade-offs inherent to it.
3. How do the papers by Blattman & Annan, Abadie & Gardeazabal, and Murdoch & Sandler fit into the “research agenda for the future” suggested by Raemdonck & Diehl? Is there any one vexing question that remains unanswered, in your opinion? If so, why is that question important? Would you modify the Raemdonck & Diehl agenda in any way? How?

II. Origins of civil war

Given competition for scarce resources without enforced property rights, people can produce their own goods and trade or they can appropriate what others have. It seems obvious that violence results. This explanation is nice because it's simple, but it leads to two puzzles: (1) Groups, not lone individuals, fight wars. How do such groups form? And why does anyone join them and engage in violence when his or her participation seems both dangerous and inconsequential to the war's eventual outcome? We approach this puzzle armed, first, with the fact that many civil wars feature an ethnic cleavage, and second, with the notion that people may have diverse reasons for joining a rebellion. The other puzzle is: (2) Why don't people strike a peaceful deal reflecting the war's eventual outcome instead of fighting it? We approach this puzzle in the abstract and in application, using one solution to the puzzle—the “credible-commitment problem”—to account for a robust fact: civil war and bad economic times tend to happen together.

DAY 3: WHY DO ETHNIC CLEAVAGES AND CIVIL WAR TEND TO GO TOGETHER?

Required readings:

1. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin. Violence and the social construction of ethnic identity. *International Organization*, pages 845–877, Autumn 2000.
2. Daniel N. Posner. The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi. *American Political Science Review*, 98(04):529–545, 2004.
3. James Habyarimana, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. Why does ethnic diversity undermine public goods provision? *American Political Science Review*, 101(04):709–725, 2007.
4. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin. Explaining interethnic cooperation. *The American Political Science Review*, 90(4):715–735, 1996.

Short essay questions:

1. Elites, mass publics and discursive scripts may each contribute to antagonistic interethnic relations according to Fearon and Laitin (2000). In each case, how? What are the mechanisms?
2. Compare and contrast the answers that Posner (2004) and Habyarimana et al (2007) would give to the following question: Why do some ethnic cleavages become politicized—indeed, emerge as noticeable cleavages—but not others? What processes, according to these separate points of view, might lead to interethnic antagonism? Are these processes inconsistent with any of the processes leading to ethnic antagonism that Fearon and Laitin (2000) discuss?
3. The theory in Fearon and Laitin (1996) rests on three premises:
 - (a) Social knowledge is “denser” within than across ethnic groups, making reputation a feasible tool to enhance cooperation.
 - (b) The structure of incentives in person-to-person interaction that causes the predicted intra- and inter-ethnic dynamics is a two-person Prisoner's Dilemma.
 - (c) Because of premise (a), “renegotiation” to equilibrium 3 (see p. 720 and fn 19) doesn't happen. So, groups can threaten a switch to the spiral equilibrium to keep everyone playing the in-group policing equilibrium.

Which of these assumptions seem reasonable to you and which do not? Why? Irrespective of your answer to that question, do you find the overall story to be a good account of interethnic violence? Why?

DAY 4: WHY DOES ANYONE PARTICIPATE IN CIVIL WAR?

Required readings:

1. Chapter 1 of Elisabeth Jean Wood. *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2003.
2. Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein. Who fights? The determinants of participation in civil war. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(2):436–455, 2008.
3. Chapter 3 of Jeremy M. Weinstein. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2007.
4. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher. How “free” is free-riding in civil war? Violence, insurgency, and the collective action problem. *World Politics*, 59(2):177–216, 2007.

Short essay questions:

1. How do theories focusing on (a) grievances, (b) selective incentives, and (c) social sanctions explain why people join an insurgency? What change-of-assumptions leads Wood to a fourth theory? What is the logic of the research design in Humphreys & Weinstein? What empirical results lead to the conclusion that no theory is sufficient alone? Do they convince you?
2. Why does recruiting rebels involve an adverse-selection problem, according to Weinstein? How does each of the proposed screening strategies help rebel organizations overcome the problem? Why does Weinstein think that resource-rich organizations use material selective incentives to overwhelm the collective action problem in recruitment and not screen their recruits, while resource-poor organizations perform social-endowment based recruiting and then screen their recruits? Does the answer convince you?
3. What, according to Kalyvas & Kocher, are the several explanations for why non-participation in civil war is as costly as participation? Why is the Phoenix Program in Vietnam a particularly good case to investigate? The authors’ theory seems to assume that non-participation and participation costs are the same for everyone. Why might they differ? Does it matter?

DAY 5: WHY NOT STRIKE A PEACEFUL DEAL EX ANTE?

Required readings:

1. James D. Fearon. Rationalist explanations for war. *International Organization*, 49(3):379–414, Summer 1995.
2. Robert Powell. War as a commitment problem. *International Organization*, 60:169–203, 2006.

Short essay questions:

1. What about anarchy makes war possible, according to Fearon? Suggest another way that anarchy might cause war. Does Fearon’s assumption that war is ex post costly seem reasonable to you? Why?
2. Why does the combination of “private information” and “incentives to mispresent it” lead to war in Fearon’s model? What is war supposed to accomplish in this model? In reality, would it?
3. How does the same mechanism lead to preventive wars, pre-emptive wars, and wars caused by the suspicion that one side will exploit concessions to its advantage? What is war supposed to accomplish in this model? In reality, would it?

DAY 6: WHY DO BAD ECONOMIES AND CIVIL WAR GO TOGETHER?

Required readings:

1. Edward Miguel, Shankar Satyanath, and Ernest Sergenti. Economic shocks and civil conflict: An instrumental variables approach. *Journal of Political Economy*, 112(4):735–753, 2004.
2. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. A theory of political transitions. *The American Economic Review*, 91(4):938–963, 2001.
3. Ernesto Dal Bó and Robert Powell. A model of spoils politics. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(1):207–222, 2009.

Short essay questions:

1. Explain, in your own words, why the use of an “instrument” used by Miguel et al is so crucial? What assumptions do we have to make to establish the credibility of the statistical method used? Why or why not are those assumptions valid?
2. There is a debate, alluded to in Sections I and II of Miguel et al, about the relative importance of (a) “greed,” (b) “grievances” and (c) a state’s repressive capacity in explaining civil war. How do the authors interpret their empirical results with respect to that debate? Why / why not is that interpretation reasonable?
3. What are the explanations of the empirical link between bad economic times and civil conflict (broadly construed) in Acemoglu & Robinson and Dal Bó & Powell? How do the explanations differ?

III. Explaining extraordinary violence in civil war

The accounts of civil war's origins that we read never explain the variation in anti-civilian violence within and across civil wars, but that variation is substantial. Literatures on repression, genocide, and terrorism explore the causes of anti-civilian violence outside of civil war, but it is natural to ask whether anti-civilian violence during civil war is different—whether it has a different purpose. Some argue that it does not. A theme uniting these literatures is the idea that bigotry, cruelty or unchecked emotion are to blame. This idea alone, however, doesn't explain much. In our next two meetings we encounter two theories describing wartime interactions between people who are greedy, fearful, cruel, bigoted, and malicious, but rational. The first points to motives for denunciation under the unique logic of insurgency, while the second points to the problem of adverse selection faced by rebel organizations flush with resources.

DAY 7: DENUNCIATION, INSURGENCY AND THE PRIVATIZATION OF WARFARE

Required readings:

1. Pages 28-31 and Chapter 3 of Stathis N. Kalyvas. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2006.
2. Chapters 6 of Kalyvas (2006).
3. Chapter 7, 10 and 11 of Kalyvas (2006).

Short essay questions:

1. What, in summary, are Kalyvas' critiques of the Breakdown, Transgression, Polarization and Technology of Warfare perspectives presented in Chapter 3? How are these perspectives related, if they are at all, to his arguments in Chapters 7, 10 and 11?
2. What would Kalyvas say about the following statements? What is the consequence of each statement for his argument? Do you find them plausible? Why?
 - (a) Insurgents and counterinsurgents shouldn't bother trying to infer a person's preferences toward either side. They should only try to measure—and act upon—that person's behavior. (Chapter 4 may help.)
 - (b) Maximizing collaboration means establishing control over the entire war-zone. (Chapter 5 may help.)
 - (c) Collaboration is key to helping insurgents or counterinsurgents establish control over territory.
 - (d) Every inhabitant of the war zone understands that when insurgents or counterinsurgents kill selectively they do so selectively, and that when they kill indiscriminately they do so indiscriminately.
 - (e) People's allegiances are unaffected when one side commits mass violence against those who collaborate with the enemy.
3. What are possible sources of intimate grievances and local cleavages?

DAY 8: ADVERSE SELECTION INTO REBEL ORGANIZATIONS

Required readings:

1. Chapters 1-2 and 6 of Jeremy M. Weinstein. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2007.

2. Pages 305-326 of Jeremy M. Weinstein. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2007.

Short essay questions:

1. What is the function of violence according to Weinstein? What is it supposed to accomplish, in your opinion?
 2. Why might or might not we expect “opportunists” to treat non-combatants more brutally than “investors” do, as Weinstein proposes?
 3. What would it mean for resource wealth and foreign patronage to be endogenous in Weinstein’s theory? If resource wealth and foreign patronage are endogenous in the way you describe, then what is another plausible story predicting a correlation (see pages 305-326) between rebels’ access to these two funding sources and the intensity and brutality of a civil war?
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IV. Transitions from civil war to peace

In our final five meetings we ask why civil wars are so often intractable, and what if anything can be done to secure the peace and improve life after war. We begin the discussion by studying two accounts of the recent wars in The Democratic Republic of Congo to establish a base of knowledge. We then turn to questions about civil war termination, post-war peace stability, peacekeeping and post-war democratization. The best efforts to answer these questions are aware that understanding how a transition from war to peace unfolds requires understanding why a war happens in the first place and how it affects politics. An ongoing debate about whether and when foreign-backed humanitarian efforts lead to peace and better politics reoccurs throughout this literature.

DAY 9: RECENT WARS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Required readings:

1. Jason K Stearns. *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: the Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. Public Affairs, New York, NY, 2011.
2. Chapter 4 of Séverine Autesserre. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2010.

Short essay questions:

1. What, in the authors’ views, were the functions of tribal and ethnic affiliations throughout the different stages of the DRC’s wars? Do those views differ?
2. What explains the proliferation of rebel groups and militias during the DRC’s wars?
3. What is the “technology” of warfare in the DRC wars? How do groups, including the government, fight and exert control over territory, institutions, and people?

DAY 10: WHY ARE CIVIL WARS SO DIFFICULT TO END?

Required readings:

1. Barbara F. Walter. The critical barrier to civil war settlement. *International Organization*, 51(3):335–364, Summer 1997.

2. James Fearon. Why do some civil wars last so much longer than others? *Journal of Peace Research*, 41(3):275–301, 2004.
3. David E. Cunningham. Veto players and civil war duration. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(4):875–892, October 2006.

Short essay questions:

1. Credible commitment problems are central to both Walter’s and Fearon’s theories of civil-war termination, but the problems differ in important ways. Explain how.
2. In both Walter’s theory and in Fearon’s, the concept of victory is central. What is victory? Is it a meaningful concept? Why or why not? Propose an alternative way to think about civil-war termination.
3. Compared to the substantive effects of independent variables such as “sons-of-the-soil dynamics,” “contraband wars,” “coup,” and “international guarantee,” the substantive effects of Cunningham’s “veto players” variables are quite small. Does this surprise you? Can you explain this result?

DAY 11: WHEN DOES PEACE LAST?

Required readings:

1. Monica Duffy Toft. *Securing the Peace: the Durable Settlement of Civil Wars*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2010.
2. Nicholas Sambanis and Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl. What’s in a line? Is partition a solution to civil war? *International Security*, 34(2):82–118, 2011/08/23 2009.
3. Dawn Brancati. Decentralization: Fueling the fire or dampening the flames of ethnic conflict and secessionism? *International Organization*, 60(03):651–685, 2006.

Short essay questions:

1. No essays.

DAY 12: PEACE-KEEPERS, PEACE-BUILDERS AND THE STABILITY OF PEACE

Required readings:

1. Virginia Page Fortna. *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices After Civil War*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2008.
2. Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 6 of Séverine Autesserre. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2010.

Short essay questions:

1. No essays.

DAY 13: CAN DEMOCRACY FOLLOW CIVIL WAR?

Required readings:

1. Leonard Wantchekon. The paradox of “warlord” democracy: A theoretical investigation. *American Political Science Review*, 98(01):17–33, 2004.
2. Elisabeth Jean Wood. An insurgent path to democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 34(8):862–888, 2001.
3. Chapter 9 of Roland Paris. *At War’s End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2004.
4. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George W. Downs. Intervention and democracy. *International Organization*, 60(03):627–649, 2006.

Short essay questions:

1. No essays.