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# Civil Wars

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.3>

## Summary

A civil war, also known as intrastate war, is a war between organized groups within the same state or country. It is a high-intensity conflict that often involves regular armed forces. One of the reasons for the lack of consensus in the study of civil war is disagreement over what exactly civil war means. Theoretically, civil war overlaps with other categories of armed conflict, particularly revolution, political violence, ethnic conflict, and terrorism. Civil wars since the end of World War II have lasted for over four years on average, a considerable rise from the one-and-a-half-year average of the 1900–1944 period. While the rate of emergence of new civil wars has been relatively steady since the mid-19th century, the increasing length of those wars has resulted in increasing numbers of wars ongoing at any one time. Since 1945, civil wars have resulted in the deaths of over 25 million people, as well as the forced displacement of millions more, along with economic collapse. According to scholars of civil war research, the causes of civil war include economic motivations or greed, and political or social grievances. Greed-based explanations focus on individuals' desire to maximize their profits, while grievance-based explanations center on conflict as a response to socioeconomic or political injustice. A third concept, opportunity-based explanations, talks about factors that make it easier to engage in violent mobilization.

**Keywords:** [civil war](#), [armed conflict](#), [revolution](#), [political violence](#), [ethnic conflict](#), [terrorism](#), [economic collapse](#), [greed](#), [grievances](#)

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A civil war, also known as an intrastate war in polemology, is a war between organized groups within the same state or country. The aim of one side may be to take control of the country or a region, to achieve independence for a region or to change government policies. The term is a calque of Latin *bellum civile* which was used to refer to the various civil wars of the Roman Republic in the 1st century BC. Both the Korean War and Vietnam War began as civil wars but ended up drawing in resources from the US and Soviet Union. These two graphs show precisely how the number of civil wars increased from the end of the Second World War before peaking in the 1990s and the distribution of conflict lengths. During this peak, around a third of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were engaged in civil war. James Fearon and David Laitin explain the peak in the 1990s as the result of the accumulation of protracted conflicts:<sup>2</sup> A civil war is a war in which parties within the same culture, society, or nationality fight against each other for the control of political power. Some civil wars are categorized as revolutions when major societal restructuring is a possible outcome of the conflict. An insurgency, whether successful or not, is likely to be classified as a civil war by historians if organized armies fight conventional battles. A civil war is a war that takes place between two or more groups in one country. While civil wars can take place for many of reasons, there are two common reasons. The first is because the different groups disagree about who should be in charge, or how the country should be run. If two political parties disagree about the result of an election, this might lead to a war if the two sides cannot or would not come to an agreement.