POL 266: Modern Civil Wars, Fall 2025

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COURSE OVERVIEW

In 2024 there were 61 state-based conflicts, the most ever since modern data collection began. Of these 57 were between the government(s) of a state and a non-state armed actor (what we call intrastate conflicts or civil wars). This course will explore the issue of these civil wars in an empirical perspective, exploring what civil wars are and how they compare to other forms of conflict, what causes them (civil war onset), who participates in them (collective action problems, rebel recruitment, women in armed rebellion), what happens during them (with particular emphasis on civilian victimization), and how these wars either end or persist (negotiated resolutions, peacekeeping, and transitional justice). In the process this course's goal is to offer you a strong introduction to the empirical literature of modern civil wars.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After completing this course, you should possess the analytical and theoretical tools necessary to evaluate the topics surrounding modern civil wars. At the end of the course, you are expected to accomplish these objectives, and your progress will be monitored and assessed as follows:

Objective	Outcome	Assessment
Understand the concept of civil wars, how they are commonly studied, and the major theoretical arguments explaining its incidence and resolution. (Topical Knowledge)	Complete reading assignments and attend class	Participation, reading quizzes, threat assessment/research paper and written examinations
Develop ability to communicate ideas and arguments effectively in oral communication (Oral communication)	Participate in class regularly, discuss your conflict case, and participate in simulated negotiations	Participation and simulation
Develop ability to communicate ideas and arguments effectively in writing. (Written communication)	Complete threat assessment or research paper, and written examinations	Written examinations, Op-ed essay, and either a research paper or threat assessment
Apply critical reasoning to the analysis of real-world problems. (Analytic skills)	Engage analytically with historical and current issues in readings and lectures.	Op-ed essay, research paper or threat assessment, and simulation

CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY

Learning is more than memorizing information. Learning requires active participation in a process that helps us to develop *well-reasoned* judgments and opinions. This course will function better if students interact with and discuss the readings, learning to critique and offer their own personal judgment on the topics and findings we discuss. I, as a professor, am not infallible, and neither are the authors that we read. Many of the topics we cover are part of larger political and academic debates. I encourage students to question and discuss the material. If you do not understand something, ask a question. If you disagree with something, challenge it, and offer the reasons for your critique. A primary goal of this class is to help develop students into critical thinkers and problem solvers. Students are urged to speak their minds, explore ideas and arguments, and play devil's advocate. This also requires that we engage in civil discussion with one another. While we engage with contentious issues, all class members – including the professor, fellow students and guests – will treat each other in a civil manner and will create an environment that encourages learning through deliberation and collegial understanding.

COURSE ALTERATIONS

Be advised that I reserve the right to make reasonable changes to the course requirements and reading schedule. This includes, but is not limited to, revising, adding or eliminating assignments and reallocating course percentage of various assignments. Any changes, however, will be announced and discussed in class.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Kalyvas, Stathis. 2006. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.
2. *All additional readings will be provided to the student and posted to Canvas.*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grades in this course will be determined as follows:

Participation: 15%
Reading Quizzes: 10%
Simulation: 10%
Op-Ed Essay: 15%
Conflict Threat Assessment: 20%
Final Exam: 30%

All electronically submitted assignments should be titled with the following format "Last name_Assignment name" and uploaded to Canvas.

Policy on Late Assignments: All work is expected to be turned in by the assigned deadline. My policy on late work is that I will accept late submissions at a penalty of 20% per calendar day after the due-date. If you are having trouble meeting deadlines due to challenges please reach out

to me and we can discuss reasonable accommodations. In-classroom work such as simulations and participation will not have a make-up without a documented medical or family emergency.

Grading Scale:

95-100	A	73-77	C
90-95	A-	70-73	C-
87-90	B+	67-70	D+
83-87	B	63-67	D
80-83	B-	60-63	D-
77-80	C+	0-60	F

Note on Final Grades: I do not round up end-of-semester grades at the request of students. The time to be concerned about your course grade is earlier in the semester when there is ample time to improve it, and not at the 11th hour. If you ever want to meet to talk about your course grade or how to improve your performance in this class, please reach out to me, but do so before our time is up.

In-Class Participation (15%): You are expected to come to class having done the readings and prepared to work through the material. Every person in this class has a distinct identity, experience, and worldview which they can contribute to class. Quality participation by all students enriches not only one's own educational experience but is a service to your fellow students. As such attendance and participation are seen as essential for success in this course. The easiest way to gain points in class is by being a frequent and quality contributor in class. The easiest way to lose points is to be a silent participant across the semester.

- Attendance is necessary for a quality participation grade but not sufficient. Your participation grade assesses your participation, not how often you attended class.
- Up to two (2) unexcused absences are permitted (one full week of class). Additional unexcused absences will result in a lower course grade.
- If you are present in body but not mind, I reserve the right to count you as absent for that day. This includes being distracted by technology and side-chatter with classmates.

Please contact me if you are experiencing issues that require you to miss class time. We can work on a solution.

Reading Quizzes (10%): On any given day you may be tasked with completing a short reading quiz. The purpose behind this assignment is to help you prepare for the class period and to approach the readings with purpose. They will assess your understanding of the readings and create accountability surrounding their completion. I will take your 10 highest graded quizzes and drop the remaining.

Classroom Simulation (10%): During the final week of class our sessions will be focused on a simulated peace process negotiation. As a class you will split off into groups and take on the role of actors involved in negotiating a peace settlement (Government, Moderate Rebels, Extremist Rebels, United Nations, Third-party States, etc.). Each role will have its own objectives and capabilities, including potential constraints. The goal of the class will be to reach a negotiated settlement that ends the war, but not every actor will be as willing to agree to a deal, and along

the way the simulation will showcase the difficulties in achieving peaceful resolutions. This grade is participation based.

Op-Ed Essay (15%): An 800-1,000-word essay in the style of an op-ed piece for a newspaper or online site (e.g. Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy or New York Times) dealing with the themes of the course. The goal here is to inform, argue, and persuade. The choice of topic is entirely up to you (as long as it matches the theme of the course), and I encourage you to select something you are passionate about. Grading will be based on the quality of the writing, the clarity of the argument and how well it is supported by relevant literature from the course. You should clearly state your position or argument, use evidence, and connect it to a relevant policy debate.

Conflict Threat Assessment (20%): A threat assessment is defined by the DHS as "the process of identifying or evaluating entities, actions, or occurrences, whether natural or man-made, that have or indicate the potential to harm life, information, operations and/or property." In this case, you will be tasked with identifying and evaluating an *ongoing* intrastate war. Your emphasis should be on applying class topics (though you may venture beyond what we discuss in class) to the conflict as a whole and the primary belligerent actors participating in it. At the end you should arrive at an assessment of the threat this conflict poses, such as to the international system, the specific region, or the country and its citizens. You may also explore the potential for peace and how that process might proceed.

This assignment will proceed in sequential parts across the semester (Topic, Rough Draft, and Final Draft). This is meant to split the workload, allowing you to make incremental progress on the assignment, as well as allowing me to provide feedback along the way.

Alternative Essay: If you are particularly interested in producing an empirical research paper on a topic related to civil war (similar to those we will read in class), please notify me. This assignment can be an opportunity for you to take a more creative and personal route, producing original research that you may find useful in your academic development. While the broad expectations remain the same, the specific format and sections will differ from the assessment paper.

Final Exam (30%): Your final exam will be a set of take-home, open-book essay questions covering course material from the entire semester. You will receive the questions at least one week in advance and will have until December 9th, 2025 at 11:59 PM EST to submit them.

COURSE POLICIES

Policy on Academic Integrity

Wake Forest University is committed to a culture of academic integrity. As a part of this community, you share the responsibility for creating a place of honesty, intellectual curiosity, and individual accountability. As you committed to with your honor pledge signature, you agree "not to deceive any member of the community; not to steal, cheat, or plagiarize on academic work; and not to engage in any other form of academic misconduct." If you have questions about documenting your work, working with external sources, working with peers on assigned work,

etc., consult with me as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Honor and Ethics Council.

Policy on Artificial Intelligence

To maintain a culture of integrity and respect, generative AI tools (i.e., ChatGPT) should not be used for the submission of your assignments. The material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. The use of these programs may also stifle your own independent thinking and creativity. Any assignment generated by AI cannot be considered as your own. All sources used in your project and paper should be cited properly in your assignment. Any final version of the assignment generated by AI tools will be considered basis for failure of the assignment and significant repercussions to the final course grade, up to and including an "F".

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Wake Forest University provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Academic accommodations are coordinated through the Center for Learning, Access, and Student Success (CLASS). If you would like to request accommodations for this course, you should contact CLASS as early in the semester as possible (118 Reynolda Hall, 336-758-5929, class.wfu.edu). Retroactive accommodations will not be provided.

Discrimination and Bias

You deserve a community free of bias and discrimination. A bias incident is an act or behavior consciously or unconsciously motivated by the offender's bias against facets of another's identity. As stated in the University's Equal Opportunity Policy, these facets include: race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, genetic information, disability and veteran status. Bias may be directed toward an individual or group and may contribute to creating an unsafe / unwelcoming environment. If you experience or witness an incident of bias or discrimination, please visit https://reportbias.wfu.edu.

Student Wellbeing

Mental Health

Students experiencing psychological/emotional distress may avail themselves of support through the University Counseling Center Monday-Friday, 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM in Reynolda 117 (336.758.5273 or counselingcenter.wfu.edu). Crisis support is also available after-hours by calling 336.758.5273 and pressing 1 to speak to a crisis counselor.

Chaplain's Office

Support outside of the University Counseling Center may also include the Chaplain's Office (336.758.5210 or chaplain.wfu.edu) and Deacon Health (336.758.5218 or deaconhealth.wfu.edu).

Collegiate Recovery Community

Many students are impacted by alcohol, drug use, or other addictive behavior while in college, which can be disruptive to both personal and academic life. The Wake Forest Collegiate Recovery Community is a supportive environment within the campus culture that reinforces the decision to disengage from addictive behavior. It is designed to provide an educational opportunity alongside recovery support to ensure that students do not have to sacrifice one for the other. If you have any concerns about your substance use, I encourage you to reach out and utilize the services through the Office of Wellbeing: see CRC website or email recovery@wfu.edu

Sexual Misconduct

The University Safe Office provides confidential support for sexual assault, interpersonal violence and any other form of sexual misconduct or harassment. They also can provide information on reporting options and assistance with academic accommodation requests. Their 24-hour Help line is 336-758-5285. For non-urgent concerns they can be reached at safe@wfu.edu. You may find information about the Safe Office online at safeoffice.wfu.edu.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (Subject to change):

I reserve the right to add or remove readings and shift the schedule within reason during the semester. Students will be notified of any such changes. ***Readings should be completed before class.***

Explore the UCDP Encyclopedia
https://ucdp.uu.se/encyclopedia

Explore the Interactive Global Conflict Tracker, Council on Foreign Relations
https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker

Week 1: Introduction to Civil Wars

Monday, August 25: Introduction to the course; Challenges of Conducting Conflict Research
- **Read:** Loyle and Simoni (2017) "Researching Under Fire: Political Science and Researcher Trauma"

Wednesday, August 27: Trends in Civil War
- **Read:** Kalyvas (2001) "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?"
- **Read:** Walter (2017) "The New New Civil Wars"

Week 2: Defining Civil War

Monday, September 1: Conceptual and Operational Definitions
- **Read:** Sambanis (2004) "What is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition." Pg. 814-831
- **Read:** UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook Version 25.1, https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/ucdpprio/ucdp-prio-acd-251.pdf

Wednesday, September 3: Data Activity
- **Download:** UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Version 25.1, https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#armedconflict

Week 3: Onset of War pt. 1

Monday, September 8: Grievance-based Explanations
- **Read**: Cederman et al. (2013) "Inequality, Grievances and Civil War" Ch. 2, 3

Wednesday, September 10: Institutional Explanations
- **Read**: James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." Pg. 75-82
- **Read:** James Raymond Vreeland. 2008. "The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy."

Note: Topic is Due Sunday, September 14th at 11:59 PM EST. You can change your case at a later date, but I would like you to make a preliminary choice here.

Week 4: Onset of War pt. 2

Monday, September 15: Opportunity-based Explanations

- **Read**: Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." Pg. 563-572
- **Read**: Ross (2004) "How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War?" pg. 38-42, 50-52, 56-end
- **Read**: Dube, Oeindrila and Juan Vargas. 2013. "Commodity Price Shocks and Civil Conflict: Evidence from Colombia." Pg. 1384-1391

Wednesday, September 17: Bargaining Explanations

- **Read**: Walter (2009) "Bargaining Failures and Civil War" p. 244-252

Week 5: Fight, Flight, or Fence-Sit

Monday, September 22: Collective Action Problems and Free-Riding

- **Read**: Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) "How Free is Free Riding in Civil Wars?"
- **Read**: Eck (2014) "Coercion in Rebel Recruitment"

Wednesday, September 24: Forcible Displacement – "The Decision to Flee"

- **Read**: Adhikari (2012) "The Plight of the Forgotten Ones: Civil War and Forced Migration"

Week 6: Who Rebels?

Monday, September 29: Rebel Recruitment

- **Read**: Weinstein (2005) "Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment" pg. 598-604, 609-618
- **Read**: Kalyvas (2006) "The Logic of Violence in civil War pg. 87-106, 118-132
- **Find:** The groups in your conflict in Soules' (2023) narrative document.
    - **See:** Soules' (2023) "Recruiting rebels: introducing the rebel appeals and incentives dataset"

Wednesday, October 1: Women in Armed Rebellion

- **Read**: Thomas and Wood (2018) "The social origins of female combatants" pg. 215-220
- **Read:** Marks (2014) "Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone's Civil War"
- **Find:** The groups in your conflict in Loken & Matfess' (2024) narrative document.
    - **See:** Loken and Matfess (2024) "Introducing the Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) project, 1946-2015"

Week 7: Introduction to Violence against Civilians

Monday, October 6: Intro to Violence against Civilians

- **Read:** Balcells and Stanton (2021) "Violence Against Civilians During Armed Conflict" pg. 49-58
- **Read:** Kalyvas (2006) "The Logic of Violence in Civil War" Ch. 3

Wednesday, October 8: Selective vs. Indiscriminate Violence

- **Read**: Kalyvas (2006) "The Logic of Violence in Civil War" pg. 141-145, all of Ch 6, 7

Week 8: Violence against Civilians cont.

Monday, October 13: No Class – Fall Break
Wednesday, October 15: Rebel Violence: Strategic Incentives
- **Read:** Thomas, Jakana (2014) "Rewarding Bad Behavior: How Governments Respond to Terrorism in Civil War" pg. 804-809
- **Read:** Wood, Reed (2014) "From Loss to Looting? Battlefield Costs and Rebel Incentives for Violence" pg. 979-984

Week 9: Violence against Civilians cont.

Monday, October 20: Rebel Violence: Institutional Dynamics
- **Read:** Hoover Green (2016) "The Commander's Dilemma"
- **Read:** Humphreys and Weinstein (2006) "Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War" pg. 429-433

Wednesday, October 22: Conflict-related Sexual Violence; Wood's Typology
- **Read:** Wood (2018) "Rape as a Practice of War"
- **Read:** Cohen (2016) "Rape During Civil War" p. 19-40

Note: Rough Draft is Due Sunday, October 26th at 11:59 PM EST.

Week 10: Violence against Civilians cont.

Monday, October 27: Data on Rebel Violence; Data Activity
- **Skim**: RHRV, UCDP GED, SVAC Codebooks – just get a general feel for the data.
- **Download:** RHRV Dataset, UCDP GED Dataset, SVAC Dataset

Wednesday, October 29: Mass Killings
- **Read**: Valentino (2004) "Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century" pg. 9-15, 30-90, 196-233

Week 11: Beasts of No Nation Movie Week

Monday, November 3: Start Movie
- **Read:** Beber and Blattman (2013) "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion"
- **Read:** Soules and Avdan (2025) "The magical practices of rebel organizations" pg. 5-8

Wednesday, November 5: Finish Movie
- **Read:** Cohen (2016) "Rape During Civil War" Ch. 3, p. 98-126

Note: Your Op-Ed Essay is Due Sunday, November 9th at 11:59 PM EST.

Week 12: The Peace Process

Monday, November 10: Peace Agreements
- **Read**: Walter (2009) "Bargaining Failures and Civil War" p. 252-258
- **Read**: Walter (1997) "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement"

- **Read**: Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) "Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management" pg. 318-323

Wednesday, November 12: Veto Players

- **Read:** Kydd and Walter (2002) "Sabotaging the Peace" pg. 263-265, 275-290
- **Read:** Cunningham (2006) "Veto Players and Civil War Duration" pg. 875-881

Week 13: The Peace Process cont.

Monday, November 17: Peacekeeping

- **Read**: Walter et al. (2021) "The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace"

Wednesday, November 19: Transitional Justice

- **Read**: Binningsbo et al. (2023) "Justice Now and Later"
- **Read**: Loyle (2021) "Rebel Justice during Armed Conflict" pg. 108-118, 125-127
- **Find**: The relevant cases in the DCJ and PCJ data for your conflict.
    - **See**: Loyle and Binningsbo (2018) "Justice during Armed Conflict: A New Dataset on Government and Rebel Strategies"
    - **See**: Binningsbo (2012) "Armed conflict and post-conflict justice, 1945-2006: A dataset"

Week 14: Rebel Governance

Monday, November 24: Rebel Governance

- **Read:** Kasfir (2015) "Rebel governance–constructing a field of inquiry: definitions, scope, patterns, order, causes."
- **Find:** The relevant actors in your conflict in Albert's (2022) narrative notes.
    - **See:** Albert (2022) "What is rebel governance? Introducing a new dataset on rebel institutions, 1945–2012"

Wednesday, November 26: Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

Note: Final Draft of Paper is due by Sunday, November 30th at 11:59 PM EST.

Week 15: Negotiated Settlement Simulation

Monday, December 1: Simulation Day 1
Wednesday, December 3: Simulation Day 2

Week 16: Final Exam Period – Tuesday, December 9th 2pm – Finish Simulation

Note: Final Exam is Due by Tuesday, December 9th at 11:59 PM EST