Civil War and Substate Conflict

Instructor: Laia Balcells (Georgetown University)

Date: June 25 - 29

Time: 9.00 am - 11.00 am

Room: 24.224 - Mercè Rodoreda Building 24 (Floor 2)

In this course we will study the causes and consequences of substate armed conflict. We will attempt to understand the causes of civil wars, their dynamics and characteristics, and their consequences. We will start by defining civil war and discussing why should we study it as a distinct phenomenon from other forms of political violence and/or international war. We will explore micro and macro level approaches to the causes of civil wars, considering classical works in economics and political science, as well as some recent contributions in the field. We will consider the relationship between the international system and civil wars, bridging the literature on internal conflict with that of international relations. We will look at different types of civil wars, paying special attention to forms of warfare and to the relationship between ethnicity and conflict. We will then dig into civil war dynamics: tactics and repertoires of violence in conflict (including violence against civilians), characteristics of armed group organizations, the varying relationship between armed groups and the state, and rebel governance during wartime. Finally, we will explore the determinants of civil war duration and termination, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, the political and economic consequences of conflict, and the impact of transitional justice processes on postwar reconciliation.

Session 1. Civil War as one form of political violence

Civil War as a form of political violence. We will undertake an overview to the different varieties of political violence (e.g. terrorism, riots, protests) and the relationship between them and civil wars.
Session 2. Causes of civil war

Causes of civil war. We will go over the main theories on the causes of civil war, both at the micro and the macro-level.

Required reading:


Further reading:


Session 3. Violence against civilians during civil war

Why are noncombatants killed during internal conflict? In this session, we will explore different theories of violence against civilians during civil war.

Required reading:


Further reading:


Session 4. The international system and civil wars

The international system and civil wars. We will discuss the relationship between international relations and domestic civil strife, with a particular emphasis on the Cold War period and its end.

Required reading:


Further reading:


Session 5. Civil war duration and termination

We will discuss civil war duration and civil war termination. What makes some civil wars longer than others? Why do some civil wars end in settlement while others end in victory? What is the role of peacekeeping missions and what are their consequences?

Required reading:


Further reading: