



# **CDSn4001: Conflict Analysis**

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## **Causes of civil war**

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# Agenda

- Defining civil war
- Causes: grievances vs resources
- Ethnicity and ethnic conflict



# Defining civil war

- A conflict between organized groups within a nation-state.
  - International war is between like actors; civil war is usually between a state and non-state opponents who adopt insurgent or terrorist tactics.
- Why is accurate definition crucial?
- Is there always a sharp distinction between internal and international war?
- What distinguishes a civil war from other types of internal contentious politics?

# Civil war: causes

- Rationalist vs symbolic explanations
- Grievances
  - Reasons people rebel
- Resources
  - Economic factors as a source of conflict and as a constraint on state's ability to resist rebellion

# Grievances

- **Grievance:** a *feeling* of being wronged
- Can be political, economic, religious, territorial, ethnic, etc. but often overlap
  - *Political:* seeking to overthrow the government or reform
  - *Economic:* seeking to force the government to adopt a different economic policy or address an economic grievance
  - *Territorial:* fight for autonomy or independence

# Why does wealth affect the likelihood of civil war occurrence?

- Poorer governments have lesser ability to address grievances and combat violent movements.
- Poorer individuals are more likely to join violent movements, because they have economically less to lose.
- People are more likely to rebel when their level of wealth departs significantly from their expectations.

# Ethnicity

- **Primordial school:** ethnicity is deeply ingrained in human history and experience; it is a fact of life in the relations between individuals and groups
- **Instrumentalists:** elites use ethnicity to manipulate and mobilize followers in the pursuit of interests like physical security, economic gains, or political power
  - Suggests that ethnic identities are fluid

# Constructivist understanding of ethnicity

- **Ethnosymbolism:** emphasis on ethnic group bound together by myths and symbols
  - Ethnic group as population sharing common myths about its origins, historical memories, and cultural features (also associated with a territory and has a sense of solidarity)
- Political exploitation of ethnicity is constrained by pre-existing cultural context
- Emotions (not rational calculations) motivate people to act



# Debate

- What is the predictive power of “old” theories?

