

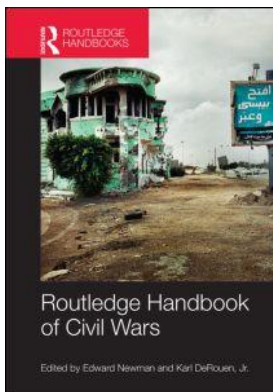
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 23 Oct 2018

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars

Edward Newman, Karl DeRouen

Patterns of Civil Wars in the Twenty-First Century

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203105962.ch19>

Meredith Reid Sarkees

Published online on: 18 Feb 2014

How to cite :- Meredith Reid Sarkees. 18 Feb 2014, *Patterns of Civil Wars in the Twenty-First Century from:* Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars Routledge

Accessed on: 23 Oct 2018

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203105962.ch19>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

19

PATTERNS OF CIVIL WARS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The decline of civil war?

Meredith Reid Sarkees

The patterns of war that one sees are strongly dependent upon where one sits ideologically, the vantage point one selects, one's focus, and the breadth of one's field of vision. Differences in these elements have produced quite contradictory descriptions of patterns in all warfare and in civil wars as well. For instance, some researchers emphasize the enduring nature of civil war: "Since the end of World War II, civil war, not interstate war, has been the most frequent, deadly, and persistent form of armed conflict in the international system, regardless of whose count one uses" (Mason *et al.*, 1999: 239). While others, like the *Human Security Report*, highlight a downward trend in both international wars since 1967 and in civil wars within the last 20 years, since the end of the Cold War (Human Security Project, 2011: 19, 61). One possible explanation for this difference in emphasis could merely be a divergence in general outlook: Does one have a glass-half-full or a glass-half-empty perspective? Yet, there are also a number of more significant reasons for these contrasting perspectives, including: differing ways in which wars in general, and civil wars in particular, are defined; the time periods utilized; and the ways in which wars are counted (war onsets, wars underway, rolling averages). Some of these differences have been addressed by Edward Newman and Karl DeRouen in their introduction to this volume. Another comparison of the disparate findings in terms of civil war onsets can be found in Dixon (2009) and for violent conflicts in Eberwein and Chojnacki (2001) and Sarkees (2003, 2004b). Rather than presenting a detailed comparison of the various civil war datasets, this chapter will briefly compare two of the major conflict data-gathering projects, the Correlates of War Project (COW) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), in terms of their definitions and categorizations of war. These differences have led to contrasting ways in which the projects address the trends in war generally and civil war in particular. Recent debates in the literature have particularly highlighted the need for those who utilize conflict data to be aware of the parameters within which they were generated. In this vein, this article then presents a detailed description of the COW categorization of war and the trends that we see in civil wars.

Comparing COW and UCDP

In Chapter 2 of this volume "Theoretical Developments in Understanding the Origins of Civil War," Peter Wallensteen highlights a few of the ways in which the UCDP study of conflict emerged and the differences in its approach from that of COW. As he notes, UCDP's initial aim

was to identify smaller armed conflicts, those in which battle-related deaths were more than 25 but fewer than 1,000 in a calendar year, though the data also include conflicts with over 1,000 battle-deaths per year. UCDP, and the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict data set (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002), categorize instances of more than 25 but fewer than 1,000 battle-deaths per year as minor armed conflict, and those with over 1,000 battle-deaths as war; thereby UCDP adopted the COW definition of war as armed conflict in which there were 1,000 battle-related deaths in a year, as developed by Singer and Small (1972). UCDP's conflicts include both inter-state and intra-state conflicts, and thus one might assume that the UCDP data could serve as an augmentation of the COW data. However detailed discussions between UCDP and COW in Uppsala in 2001 revealed the extent to which the projects have really been examining different aspects of armed conflict (Sarkees and Singer, 2001, 2000). COW's primary focus has been upon war, though it has included lower-fatality level conflict in its Militarized Inter-state Disputes dataset. Another significant dissimilarity, as Wallensteen notes, is that for UCDP the time frame examined is much shorter, 1946–2011 in comparison to COW's range (in the most recent release of the data) of 1816–2007. The ways in which UCDP and COW structure their data also diverge: the primary unit of analysis for UCDP is the calendar year, with the conflict defined in terms of the contestation (a conflict must concern a disagreement over government or territory). The project has also recently added datasets for non-state conflict and one-sided violence for 1989–2011. For COW the unit of analysis is the war itself, described generally in terms of the experience of the inter-state system member(s) involved. The two projects also define battle-related deaths differently: UCDP includes all combat-related fatalities (of both combatants and civilians); whereas COW focuses on fatalities among the combatants only (including deaths by disease) (Sarkees and Singer, 2001).

Though these differences may not seem particularly profound, they lead to very differing populations of wars, even if one examines only the time period where the two data-projects overlap (Eberwein and Chojnacki, 2001). UCDP's focus on the calendar year and battle-deaths within that period means that conflicts in which 500 battle-deaths occur in December of one year and another 500 in the January of the following year would not be coded as wars; while COW categorizes as wars conflicts with 1,000 battle-deaths within a 12-month period from the onset of the war. The calendar-year focus can also result in differing start and end dates for wars; and cases whereby UCDP describes one conflict over long periods, whereas COW might have several wars (and vice-versa). UCDP's requirement that conflict concern a contestation over government or territory also means that conflicts not addressing these issues can be omitted (Sarkees and Singer, 2001).

The ways in which projects gather data greatly influence the ways in which the data can, or should, be utilized, and the resulting ways in which one analyzes armed conflict. This can be seen in the recent discussion concerning the trends in war (based on fatality figures) that were derived from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Battle Deaths dataset (which is based upon the UCDP data and coding rules). Lacina and Gleditsch (2005) released the Battle Deaths dataset in an attempt to provide a more consistent means of examining the measurement of warfare and conflict severity. As noted above, their definition of conflict severity is deaths from combat situations (of both combatants and civilians) within a calendar year. For those gathering conflict data, obtaining accurate numbers of fatalities is one of the most complicated and difficult tasks due to a plethora of problems, including misuse of the terms “casualties” and “fatalities,” political reasons for either the under-reporting or exaggeration of fatalities, and either a lack of information or the presence of conflicting information in the available sources (Sarkees, 2010a). The Battle Deaths dataset attempted to alert users of the data to such difficulties, and to provide a significant level of transparency in terms of explaining how fatality levels were established, by

including variables for the high fatality estimate, low estimate, and a best guess. This data was used (Lacina and Gleditsch, 2005; Lacina *et al.*, 2006) to argue that the number of deaths in combat and the relative risk of dying in combat have recently declined. Gohdes and Price (2012) subjected the data to statistical reanalysis, and they ultimately concluded that: “there is no evidence for a significant decline in the risk of dying in battle” and that “we believe that this dataset is inappropriate for analyzing global trends in conflict severity and intensity” (*ibid.*: 2, 12). In their rejoinder to Gohdes and Price, Lacina and Gleditsch (2012: 1) contend that their finding of a decline in combat deaths is especially important since it aligns with high-profile studies that focus upon the decline of both inter-state and intra-state conflicts, and thus the “flawed” analysis of Gohdes and Price must be contested. This exchange is interesting not only because of its relevance for the broader examination of the trends of war, but also because it highlights the importance of understanding and explicitly addressing the ramifications of a dataset’s coding rules, a process that is frequently omitted by users of conflict datasets.

In terms of this latter context, Gohdes and Price presented a critique of the Battle Deaths dataset’s fatality statistics and the ways in which they were derived. Though their criticism falls into two major categories: problems of data availability, and problems of data quality, much of it can be linked to the UCDP/PRIO adoption of the calendar year as the unit of analysis, which frequently means that if only a conflict’s total fatalities are known, they are merely averaged over the total years of the conflict rather than being exact individual yearly datapoints (Gohdes and Price, 2012: 3, 6). In challenging the reliability of the Battle Deaths dataset information Gohdes and Price then caution researchers that limitations in data must be translated into limitations in one’s conclusions (*ibid.*: 15). They conclude their review by setting forth what they see as the ideal situation for quantitative analysis of conflict severity, one in which every person who is killed in combat situations is counted. The impossibility of even coming close to attaining such a standard was recognized by Lewis Richardson (1960) who used a log analysis to express ranges of fatalities as a way to improve reliability.

Though a portion of the Lacina and Gleditsch retort focuses upon what they claim is a misreading of the dataset’s codebook by Gohdes and Price, one of Gohdes and Price’s specific observations about the availability of fatality data warrants further discussion because it has had repercussions for the ways in which combat deaths are defined differently by UCDP and COW. In addressing the sources of bias in fatality statistics Gohdes and Price (2012: 9) note that the higher the visibility of the act of violence, the more likely it (and its fatalities) will be reported. Visibility can be reflected in the magnitude of armed conflict, wars are more visible than minor disputes; but visibility can also be related to the types of participants or fatalities, with deaths of those in uniform, whose job it is to fight being more visible than deaths of civilians. Visibility leads to a greater likelihood that fatalities will be reported, thus making them more reliable. As Lacina and Gleditsch note (2012: 3) the tallies provided by military agencies of personnel killed in action are very credible data. It was considerations such as these that led COW to make different choices than UCDP, in ways in which it codifies and gathers data about armed conflict: focusing primarily on higher fatality levels (war), using the war as the primary unit of analysis, and counting deaths only among combatants (rather than combatants and civilians). For a complete discussion of the specific rationales behind the COW coding of battle-deaths, see Small and Singer (1982: 66–77) and Sarkees (2000, 2001, 2009, 2010a)

Since a familiarity with the ways in which COW categorizes and gathers data on war in general, and intra-state (and civil) war in particular is critical for understanding the ways in which we look at trends in war, we now turn to a detailed discussion of the COW typology of war. COW coding rules not only differ from those of UCDP, but also provide perspectives on civil war trends that contrast with those of other studies (see Sarkees, 2003, 2004a, 2010c, 2013; Sarkees *et al.*, 2003).

The COW war typology

In the current version of the Correlates of War data on wars there are four major types of war, delineated primarily by the status of the war participants as states (or members of the inter-state system) or non-state entities.¹ Inter-state wars are those that take place between or among states; extra-state wars are those between or among a state and a non-state entity that is outside the borders of the state; intra-state wars are those that take place within the borders of a state; and non-state wars are those between or among non-state entities that take place either in territory that is not within a state, or across inter-state borders. This typology is summarized in Table 19.1 (Sarkees, 2010a, 2010d).

Though the COW dataset that has been most frequently used has been that of inter-state wars, the largest of our categories is intra-state war. Intra-state war is also the dataset that has shown the most growth since the first version published in Melvin Small and J. David Singer's *Resort to Arms* (1982): increasing from 106 civil wars to the 334 intra-state wars in the 2007 version of the data.² This increase in intra-state wars is the result of a number of research efforts, including the expansion of data-gathering in the categories of regional and inter-communal wars; the standardization of the battle-death threshold; and the availability of more detailed historical research. A more extensive discussion of these changes and brief descriptions of each of these wars can be found in Sarkees (2010a, 2010b). The list of intra-state wars can be found in Sarkees and Wayman (2010: 342–46) and on the Correlates of War website (www.correlatesofwar.org). Partially due to the sheer magnitude of this dataset, and partially due to an increasing interest in intra-state wars among the research community, a separate book within the Correlates of War series entitled, *Intra-State Wars, An Examination of Civil, Regional, and Intercommunal Wars, 1816–2012* by Jeffrey Dixon and Meredith Reid Sarkees, will be published in 2015.

Before addressing the patterns in civil wars visible through using the COW data, it is important to briefly summarize the ways in which COW defines and categorizes wars, intra-state wars, and civil wars, since these features differentiate COW from other data-gathering projects and may be significant in understanding disparate findings.

Table 19.1 Correlates of War typology of wars

I	Inter-state wars (War Type 1)
II	Extra-state wars
A	Colonial – conflict with colony (War Type 2)
B	Imperial – state vs. non-state (War Type 3)
III	Intra-state wars
A	Civil wars
1	for central control (War Type 4)
2	over local issues (War Type 5)
B	Regional internal (War Type 6)
C	Inter-communal (War Type 7)
IV	Non-state wars
A	In non-state territory (War Type 8)
B	Across state borders (War Type 9)

Defining COW intra-state war

As noted above, the COW typology of war is based on the identification of the war participants, or “who is fighting whom.” The primary focus is upon states, or the members of the inter-state system that emerged in 1816 (Singer and Small, 1972: 19–22; Russett *et al.*, 1968). Thus COW examines wars that begin from 1816 onward. Within the COW war typology, all classifications of war share the same basic definition of war that focuses upon three primary elements: armed combat, organized forces, and 1,000 battle-related deaths. Thus war is sustained armed combat, between/among organized armed forces, leading to 1,000 battle-related deaths (of combatants) per year (or 12-month period starting from the war onset). The element of sustained armed combat requires that there be effective resistance offered by both sides to a conflict, thus massacres are not considered as war. This criterion, combined with the focus on organized armed forces, means that civilian fatalities are not included in determining whether combat should be considered a war. To be a war, there must be 1,000 battle-related deaths per annum between/among the war participants, or combatants (Singer and Small, 1972: 30–2; Small and Singer, 1982: 36–54; Sarkees, 2010a: 48–58).

These criteria are also reflected in coding a war’s duration and its participants. Singer and Small (1972: 44–5) noted that the start date of a war (or onset) is coded as that of the formal declaration of war, but only if it is followed immediately by sustained military combat. If hostilities precede the formal declaration and continue in a sustained fashion, or if there is no formal declaration, the first day of combat is used. The war then continues until its termination, or as long as there is sustained military combat resulting in 1,000 battle-related deaths per year (Sarkees, 2010d: 20). The end date is the day that most clearly demarcates the close of sustained military conflict. The date of the final peace treaty would not be used unless it coincided with the end of combat. Singer and Small also coded for temporary interruptions in fighting that lasted 30 days or longer (1972: 45). However, if such a cessation of hostilities lasted for more than a year, the war is coded as having ended and any resumption of combat is coded as a new war. In other words: a war ends if: (1) there is a truce or other agreement that ends combat for a year or more; (2) if the apparent defeat of one side (absent a formal surrender or truce) ends combat for one year or more; or (3) if a 12-month period passes without 1,000 battle-deaths. In the last case, the termination date for the war is the last day in which it can be said that 1,000 battle-deaths were suffered during the previous 12 months (Dixon, 2003: 9).

Since Singer and Small were primarily concerned with gathering data on the war experience of states, or members of the inter-state system, they initially created war-participation criteria only for states: any individual member state qualified as a war participant through either of two alternative criteria: suffering a minimum of 100 fatalities, or having a minimum of 1,000 armed personnel engaged in active combat (Small and Singer, 1972: 45). As they added the civil wars, they only described the non-state participant in terms of: (1) being organized for conflict and prepared to resist armed attacks; or (2) if initially unprepared, is able to inflict 5 percent of the fatalities it sustains (Small and Singer, 1982: 215). As we continue to identify and to gather more information about the non-state war participants, we refer to the other (non-state) war participants as Non-State Entities (NSEs), which include the armed forces of both geopolitical units (GPU) and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAs), such as rebel movements, pro-government militias, community-based vigilante groups, religious movements, and foreign mercenaries. We consider an NSE to be a war participant if it either commits 100 armed personnel to combat, or suffers 25 battle-related deaths (Sarkees, 2010a: 339).

Though all categories of COW wars are based upon the same basic definitional criteria, these elements do, however, play out somewhat differently in intra-state wars as compared to other

war categories (Small and Singer, 1982; Sarkees, 2009, 2010b). For instance, determining battle-related deaths and excluding civilian fatalities can be particularly difficult for intra-state wars, where it can be harder to distinguish combatants (who may or may not wear uniforms) from civilians. Battle-death figures are also less available and less reliable for intra-state wars. Governments may have vested interests in over-reporting or under-counting fatalities (especially those of civilians), though this propensity can occur in other types of war as well. For instance a government may try to conceal the intentional or unintentional killing of civilians by claiming that they were combatants; or they may exaggerate the killing of civilians as a means of delegitimizing the opposition. The attempt to differentiate combatant and civilian deaths is further complicated by the fact that many historical reports only indicate total fatalities, without attempting to separate out fatalities suffered by each armed group. The situation is further confused by some historians who used the term “casualties” as a synonym for deaths, whereas others use the term in its more classical understanding of including both those who were killed and those who were wounded. Though there have been a number of new research efforts and data-gathering projects that have provided valuable information on disaggregating fatality statistics (like CERAC (2008) concerning deaths in Colombia), there are still significant areas of missing information in this regard which makes developing a comprehensive list of intra-state wars somewhat complicated.³

Similarly, in discussing war duration, the definitional issues become somewhat more significant for intra-state wars because they frequently encompass periods when combat waxes and wanes (perhaps during the agricultural seasons), or when combat just fades away, rather than being ended by a peace treaty or agreement. COW’s requirement of 1,000 battle-related deaths (among combatants), per 12-month period, and the related ending of a war when that level of combat is not sustained, frequently contrasts with other data-gathering projects that continue wars for long periods when combat is fairly light.

Since COW wars are classified using the criterion of the status of the war participants, the nature of the war changes if the type of participants or their relative roles in the war changes. If for instance another state intervenes in a war, but plays a minor role, the fundamental nature of the war does not change and it is coded as an intervention. However, if the intervener replaces one of the parties as the major combatant (or takes over the “bulk of the fighting”), the classification of the war must change to reflect the reality of who is fighting whom. Such interventions occur more often in the extra-state and intra-state war categories, and specifically within the category of civil wars, or wars between the central government and a rebel group. For instance, if the outside state intervener is fighting on the side of the rebels and then takes over the bulk of the fighting, the civil war ends and the conflict is transformed into an inter-state war between the intervener and the original state government. If the outside state is intervening against the rebels on the side of the government and takes up the bulk of the fighting, the civil war ends and the war becomes an extra-state war between the state intervener and a non-state actor outside the intervener’s territory.

The final coding decision that especially affects civil wars is the issue of multiple simultaneous wars. In general, COW categorizes wars as encompassing and mutually exclusive (not coding as two wars conflict between/among the same participants at the same time), though it becomes more difficult to distinguish separate wars when they take place within the confines of a state. To decide whether combat reflects: (1) a single civil war involving many NSEs opposed to the central government, or (2) several simultaneous civil wars, each characterized by the same government fighting a different GPU or NSA, the primary determinant is the degree of coordination between/among the various non-state entities. For instance, if a state is facing combat with a variety of NSAs who are coordinating their opposition, it will be coded as one

single civil war. If, on the other hand, the state is facing combat against multiple NSEs (GPUs and or NSAs), which are operating in geographically distinct regions, and are not coordinating their operations, then the conflict will be coded as multiple wars (assuming that all the other criteria for a war are met). The key difficulties with this categorization are of course identifying all of the NSEs involved in the war, and then determining how much coordination existed between/among them. Though it is relatively easy to recognize evidence of coordination: common command structures, frequent meetings or communication among NSE leaders, or joint offensives; it is much more difficult to measure the absence of such coordination. Consequently, we are in essence utilizing negative coordination criteria. In instances in which a state is engaged in combat with multiple NSEs, each of which is operating in a distinct geographic area, multiple wars will be considered to exist unless there is specific evidence of coordination and cooperation between/among the NSEs.

Defining COW civil wars

COW starts with the following basic definition of an intra-state war as sustained combat between/among organized armed forces taking place within the territorial boundaries of a state system member and leading to 1,000 battle-related deaths (of combatants) per year (or 12-month period starting from the war onset). Additionally, as noted in Table 19.1, intra-state wars are divided into three basic categories: civil wars (War Types 4 and 5), regional internal (War Type 6), and inter-communal (War Type 7), again based upon the status of the war participants, or “who is fighting whom.”

The largest of the three subcategories is that of civil wars, and COW defines civil war as sustained military conflict, “pitting the central government against an insurgent force capable of effective resistance” (Small and Singer, 1982: 216). The requirement is that civil wars must involve the active participation of the national government, specifically, that the “bulk of the fighting” on one side has to be conducted by the national government of an inter-state system member (Sarkees, 2010a: 338). The national government is then codified as those forces that were at the start of the war in de facto control of the nation’s institutions, regardless of the legality or illegality of their claim (Small and Singer, 1982: 213). As we have expanded our research on civil wars, we have added further specificity to the definition of the national institutions:

institutions of governance and whichever party begins the war in possession of the institutions of governance (parliament, the palace, etc.) may be termed the government. When each side in a civil war controls an institution (e.g. Chile’s Congressist rebellion that pitted the President against Congress), then the executive or monarch’s faction ought to be termed the government.

(Dixon, 2003: 4)

Needless to say, control of the nation’s institutions need not necessarily include control of the armed forces, which may on occasion be fighting against the executive’s government. In such cases, the government’s armed forces may then consist of civilian combatants, paramilitary groups, or other branches of the civilian or military infrastructure (including police) that remain loyal. Consequently, Small and Singer also included in the general category of “the government,” or the side of the national government, all those, from national military forces to local police, and citizens, who enter the conflict in the name of that government (1982: 213). This criterion becomes difficult to apply only in cases where two or more groups each claim to be fighting in support of the national government. In such cases,

Diplomatic recognition (or membership in the United Nations) is not a requirement for determining which group constitutes the national government. Though diplomatic recognition of a state is a requirement for an entity to be a member of the inter-state system, that is not a *de jure* recognition (or approval) of a specific government. Thus it is possible for one party to be considered by COW as the government of a state due to its control of the national institutions, while another party may be diplomatically recognized by other states, or even retain the United Nations seat (as was the case when the Northern Alliance retained the United Nations seat for Afghanistan, despite the fact that the Taliban government was in control of the national institutions in Afghanistan).

(Sarkees, 2010a: 339)

A definition of civil wars that hinges on the participation of a state's government, as does COW's, has not been universally adopted, and thus there remains an unfortunate lack of definitional clarity about what constitutes a civil war. A number of scholars use the term "civil war" to refer to any conflict within a country (analogous to COW's intra-state war category) (Kalyvas, 2006: 17). Adding to this confusion, The *Human Security Report* (2011), which uses the USDP/PRI data, uses the terms "intrastate conflict" and "civil war" apparently interchangeably, despite the definitional distinctions (as described above) that UCDP makes between minor armed conflict and war. Several, like Maoz (2007), argue that the government's participation is superfluous in describing a civil war:

Allow me to dissent from the general consensus about civil wars... The way I view it, the presence or absence of a government is immaterial in civil war. The essence of civil war outbreak is the collapse of the government's authority; the government no longer possesses a monopoly over the use of organized force. Hence, the extent of the collapse of such authority – whether the government functions at all in terms of management of force – is not an element of the definition... Moreover, the government–insurgent notion is overly narrow as it does not include cases of multiple organized groups fighting each other in a fairly intense way, e.g., Angola, 1977–1990; Rhodesia/Zimbabwe (about the same period); Lebanon (1974–91), and others.

This lack of definitional agreement complicates attempts at comparative trend analysis. Initially, Small and Singer rejected further classifying or subdividing civil wars by any of the alternative schemas, like: the types of weapons or tactics used (overt vs. covert, or conventional military vs. guerilla); or by the purposes and goals of the rebels. However, due to requests from scholars and after many years of deliberations, COW adopted a minimalist categorization of civil wars based on the objectives of the non-state participants, despite lingering concerns about the difficulty of ascertaining the objectives of political protagonists or most other entities. Civil wars were grouped into two categories based upon the apparent motives of the non-state actors, as either being: (1) conflicts for control of the central government (War Type 4), or (2) conflicts over local or regional interests (War Type 5). In War Type 4, for central control, the insurgent forces seek to overthrow the existing national regime and replace it with one that is more receptive to their material, cultural, or psychic interests. But at the more restricted local, provincial, or regional level, in War Type 5, the insurgents fight in order to modify the national regime's treatment of this particular region or group of people, to replace the local regime with a more friendly one, or to secede from the larger state-wide political system in order to set up their own regime (Sarkees, 2000; Sarkees, 2010a). In trying to make this distinction between local as distinct from central government/state-wide objectives, we not only recognize the ambiguities and

uncertainties involved in the behavior of the different elements that make up the insurgency, but we also must recognize that their objectives are far from constant. These will change as the insurgent coalition changes in its composition and in the relative power of its constituent groups, but also as the fortunes of war fluctuate. It is this changeable nature of objectives which has dissuaded the project from trying to subdivide the category of civil wars further.

Regional and inter-communal wars

The two other categories of intra-state wars, regional wars (War Type 6) and inter-communal wars (War Type 7), also take place within the boundaries of a state (inter-state system member), however they are in essence non-state wars in that neither of the major war participants (who are conducting the bulk of the fighting on each side) is the central government of the system member. In regional wars (War Type 6), one party to the conflict is a regional internal, or a subnational government; or the government of an internal geopolitical unit (GPU), such as the armed forces of the government of a province, regional state, or city. Both parties to inter-communal wars (War Type 7) are non-state armed groups (not involving government at any level as a primary war participant). Inter-communal wars are becoming more common as advanced weapons technology boosts the probability that conflicts between/among NSAs will reach the requisite battle-death threshold for war.

COW trends in war and civil war

Utilizing the COW datasets on war, one gains a perspective on the trends in warfare that varies significantly from those that utilize UCDP/PRIO data, such as Lacina and Gleditsch (2005) and the Human Security Project (2011), which both emphasize the downward trend in war (though measured differently). A fundamental difference is merely the timeframe covered, with COW examining wars after 1815 and UCDP/PRIO focusing upon the post-World War II era. An analysis of trends in all COW wars types for the period 1816 to 2007 (Sarkees, 2010c; Sarkees *et al.*, 2003) concluded that there is a relative constancy over time in war behavior. Though the onsets of wars were relatively rare events, with 654 over the 192 year period for an average of 3.4 onsets per year, they were widely distributed over time with only 12 years during the period with no war onsets (Sarkees, 2010c: 557). There were two years, 1848 and 1991, that had the largest number (11) of war onsets. Figure 19.1, which groups war onsets by decades (removing the years of 1816 and 2007 to develop ten-year groupings), shows that there was a relative consistency in war onsets of 30 per decade over time, despite some fluctuations. If one only looks at the latter decades, one might be struck by a recent decline in war onsets, however, when one looks at the entire period it is easy to see that war onsets still remain at historically high levels.

There were, however, differing patterns within the various categories of war, with intra-state wars becoming an increasing percentage of the war onsets, as seen in Figure 19.2.

Figure 19.3 shows the distribution of intra-state war onsets by year over the 1816–2007 period, and it also shows the significant increase in intra-state wars since the end of World War II. This trend can perhaps be more easily seen in Figure 19.4, which groups the intra-state war onsets by decade.

Intra-state wars are the most numerous of the four major COW categories, constituting 52 percent of all of the COW wars. As described above, intra-state wars are also subdivided into four major War Types (number 4–7). Civil wars (War Types 4 and 5) are by far the most numerous: War Type 4 (for central control) is the largest category with 174 wars or 52 percent of the intra-state wars. War Type 5 (for local issues) is the second largest with 132 wars or 40 percent of the intra-state wars. Regional (War Type 6) and inter-communal (War Type 7) are the least common, at 3 and 5 percent respectively. Figure 19.5 shows the distribution of each of these types of war over time by decade.

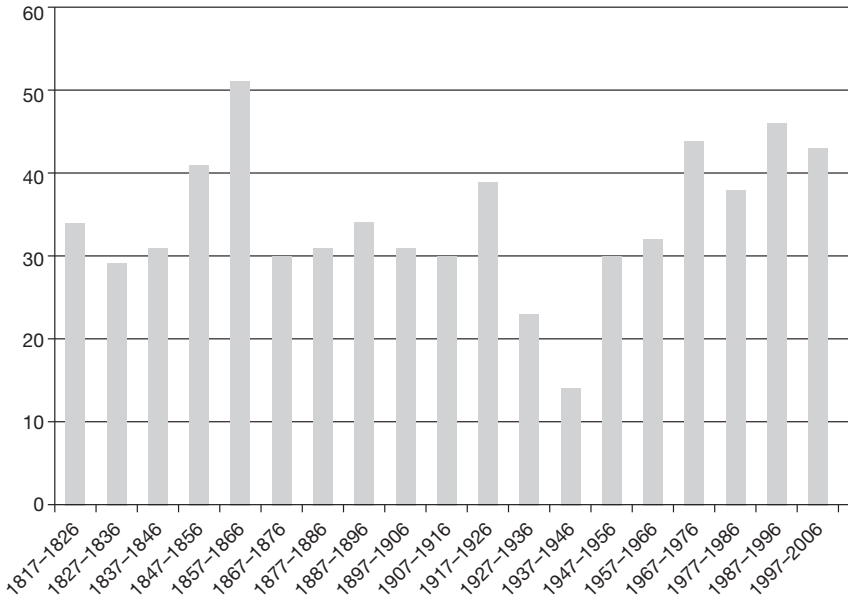


Figure 19.1 All war onsets by decade, 1817–2006

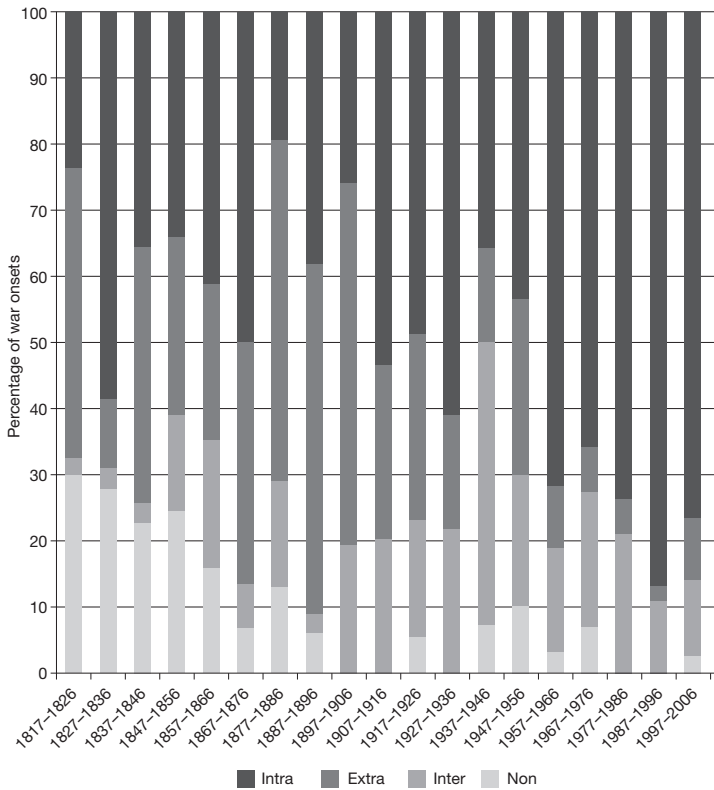


Figure 19.2 All war onsets by war type by percentage by decade, 1817–2006

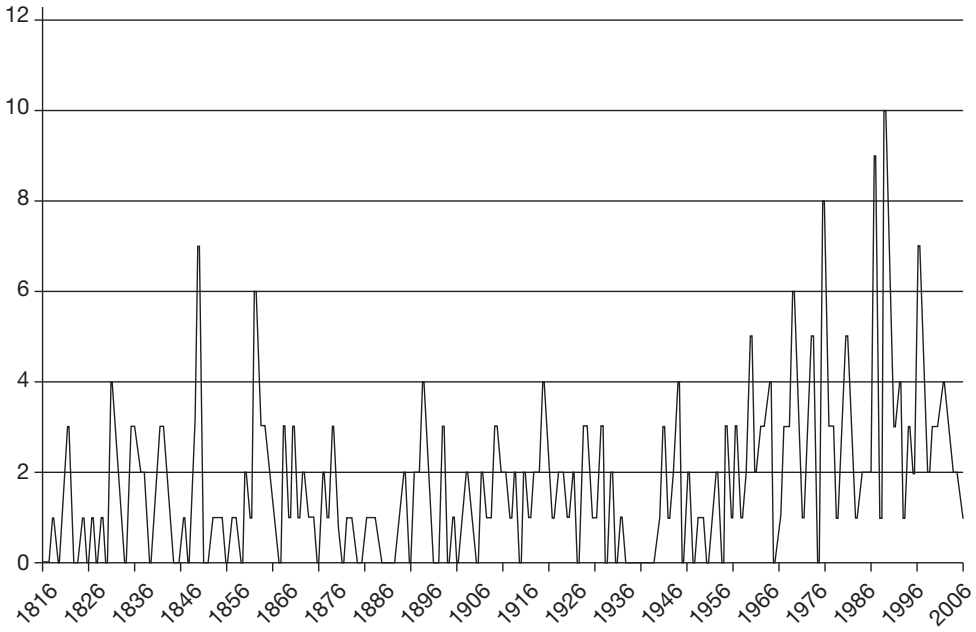


Figure 19.3 Intra-state war onsets by year, 1816–2007

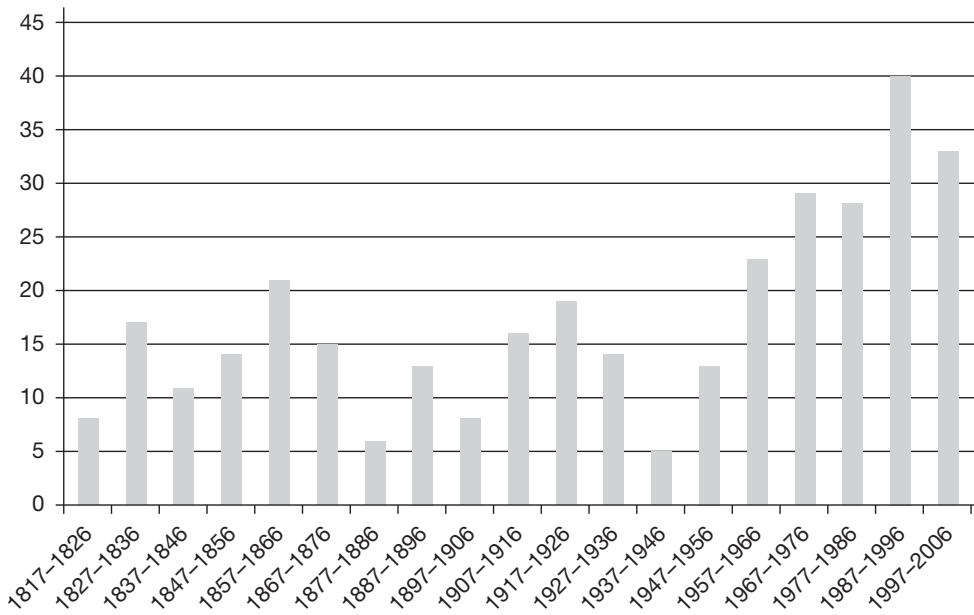


Figure 19.4 Intra-state war onsets by decade, 1817–2006

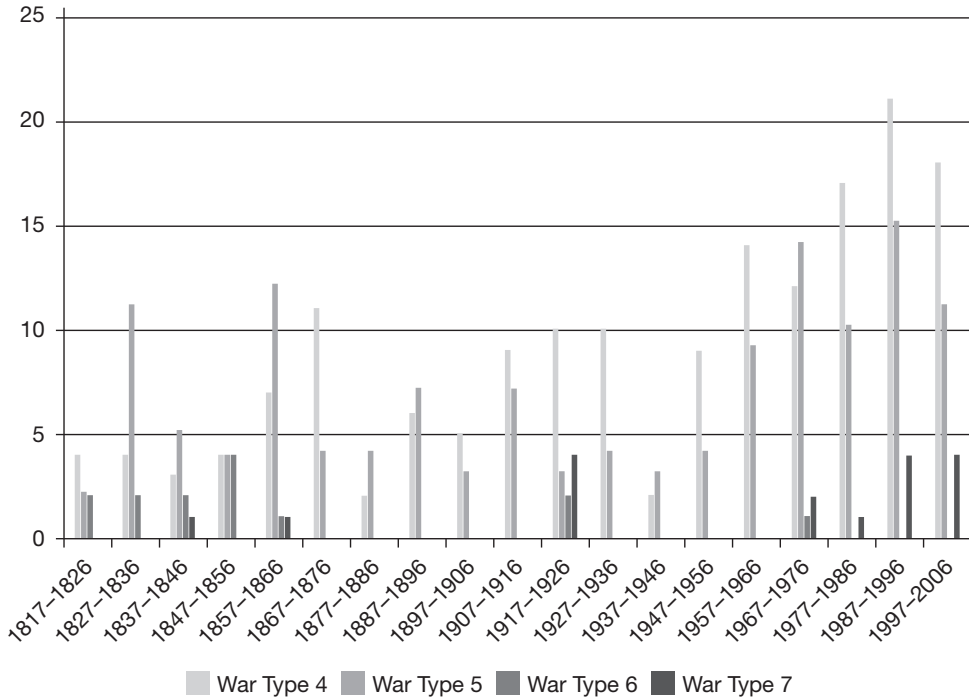


Figure 19.5 Intra-state war onsets by war type and decade, 1817–2006

Disaggregating Figure 19.5 into separate charts for each of the war types makes it easier to see other interesting trends: both civil wars for central control (War Type 4) and civil wars for local issues (War Type 5) are increasing, though there appears to be a recent light shift toward wars for control of the central government; there is a decline in regional wars (War Type 6), perhaps relating to a decline in regional autonomy; and a recent increase in the number of inter-communal wars (War Type 7), reflecting the growing capacity of non-state armed groups (see Figures 19.6 and 19.7, illustrating the two most common types).

However, the focus of this book is civil war, thus the remaining discussion here will focus only upon the COW civil wars. Civil Wars (the combination of War Types 4 and 5) are by far the most common type of intra-state war, constituting 306 of the 334 (or 92 percent) of the intra-state wars. Of the 192 years in the 1816–2007 period, there is an average number of 1.6 civil war onsets per year, and only 52 years (27 percent) experienced no civil war onsets. Looking at the distribution of civil war onsets per decade over this entire historical expanse clearly demonstrates both the relative constancy in the global experience of civil war, and the significant increase in civil war onsets over time. We code no civil war onsets from 1937 to 1943, but then a significant increase thereafter.

If one looks at the number of civil wars experienced by the various regions of the world (see Figure 19.8), the numbers look fairly comparable, though the Western Hemisphere has had the largest number of civil wars (76).

However, if one examines the regional civil war experience in terms of type of civil war (see Figure 19.9) some differences appear, with wars for control of the central government (War Type 4) being much more common in the Western Hemisphere.

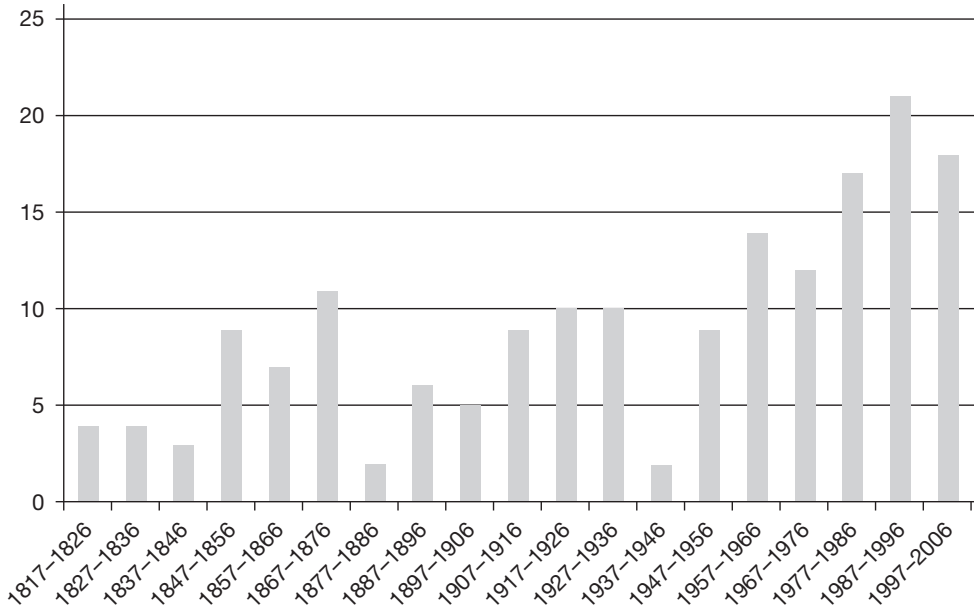


Figure 19.6 Onsets for War Type 4 by decade, 1817-2006

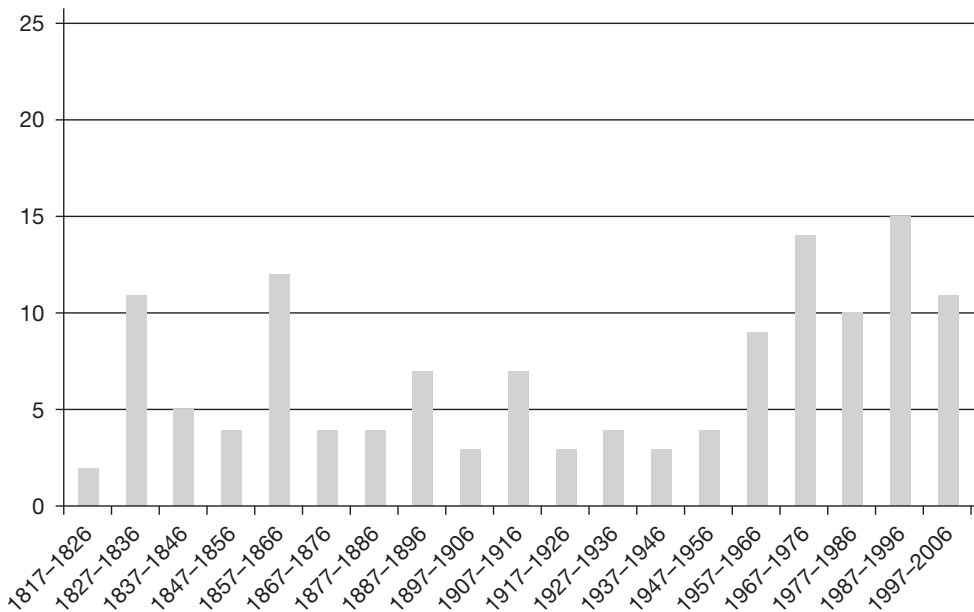


Figure 19.7 Onsets for War Type 5 by decade, 1817-2006

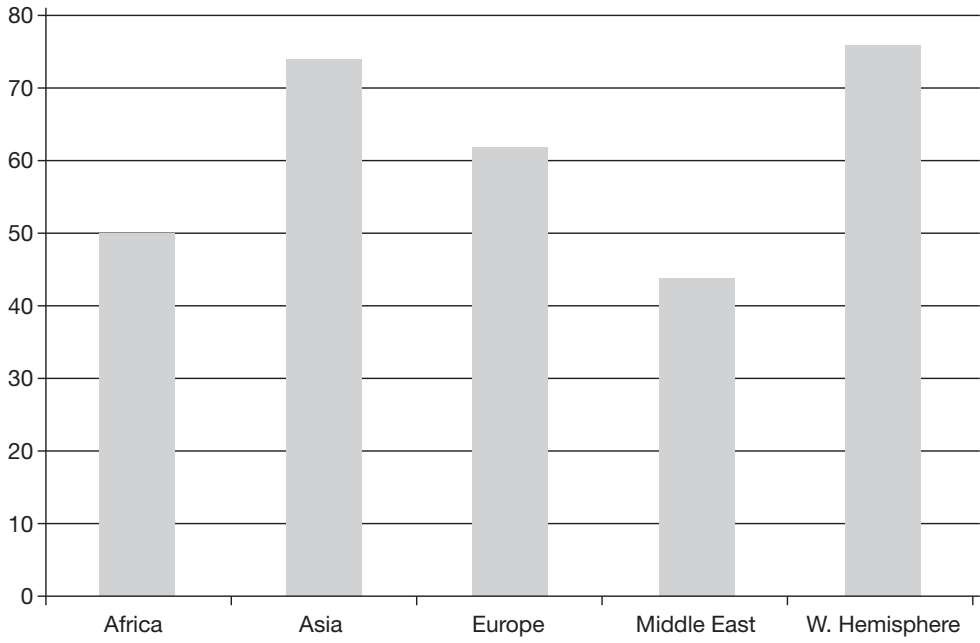


Figure 19.8 Civil war onsets by region, 1816–2007

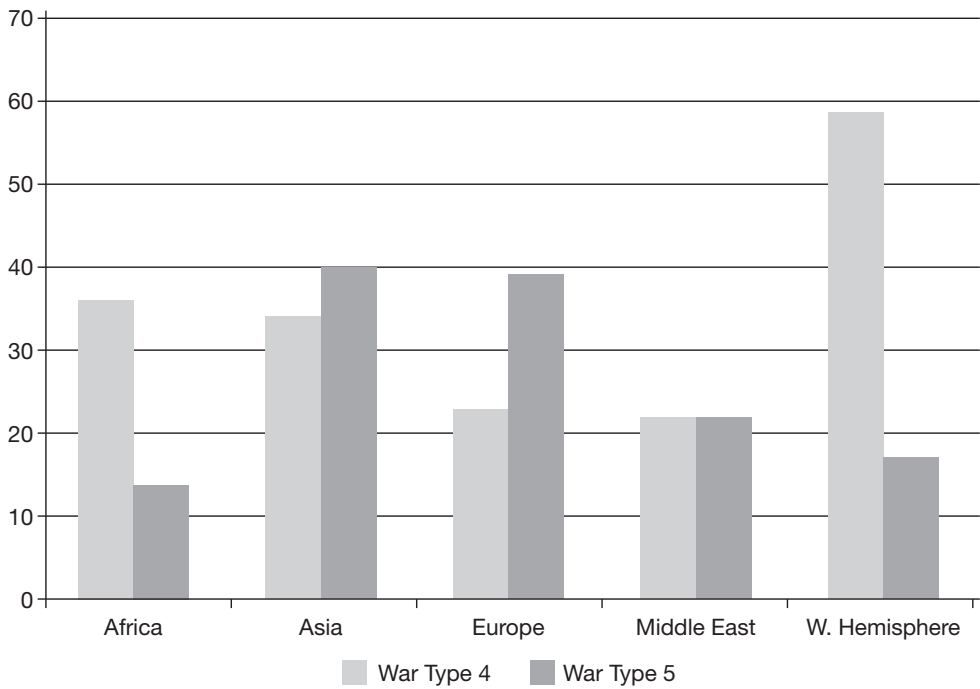


Figure 19.9 Civil war onsets by type and region, 1816–2007

Similarly, in examining the patterns of civil war onsets by region over time, some very differing patterns emerge (see Figures 19.10–19.14): civil wars begin in Africa only in 1960, linked to the rise of independent states at that time, whereas Asia’s civil wars begin 100 years earlier (1860). Europe had seen a significant decline in civil wars from a high of five onsets in 1848, but then experienced a resurgence to four onsets in 1991. The number of civil wars in the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere has been much more constant over the entire period.

A final trend that is visible in examining the data is an increase in the number of civil wars that are internationalized by the intervention of another state system member(s). Figure 19.15 shows the distribution of internationalized civil wars over time, with the clustering after 1960.

This increase in internationalized civil wars is also visible in the comparison of the internationalized onsets per decade with the onsets of all civil wars in Figure 19.16, though the percentage of all civil wars that are internationalized has declined from 48 percent in 1957–1966 (during the height of the Cold War) to 24 percent in 1997–2006.

This trend parallels the finding of Regan (1996) who noted the internationalization of 62 percent of civil conflicts (not just wars) in the post-World War II era, though his higher percentage was the result of intervention criteria that were not limited to military intervention.

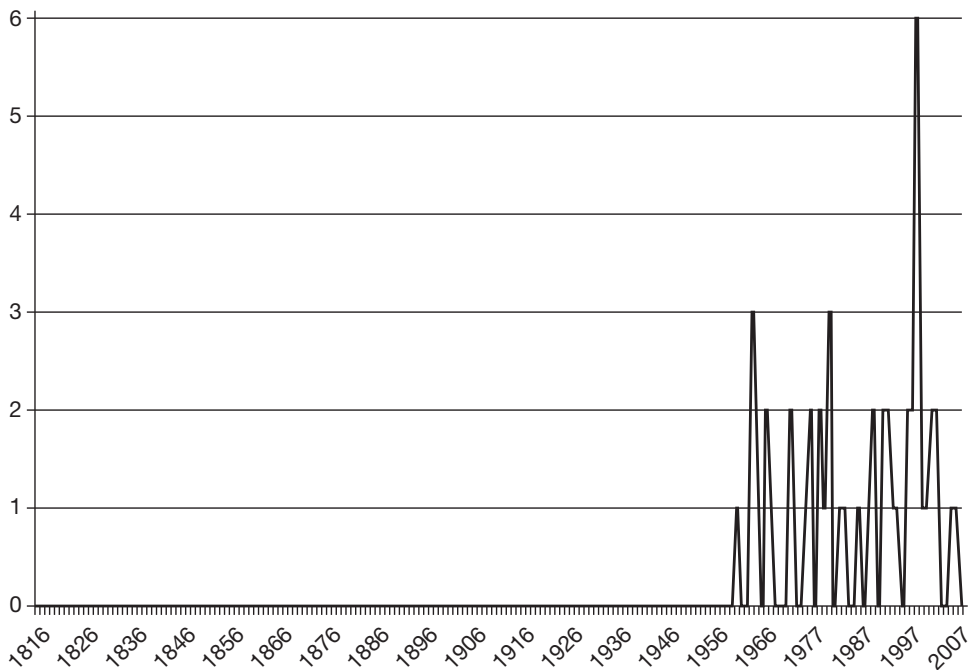


Figure 19.10 Civil war onsets for Africa by year, 1816–2007

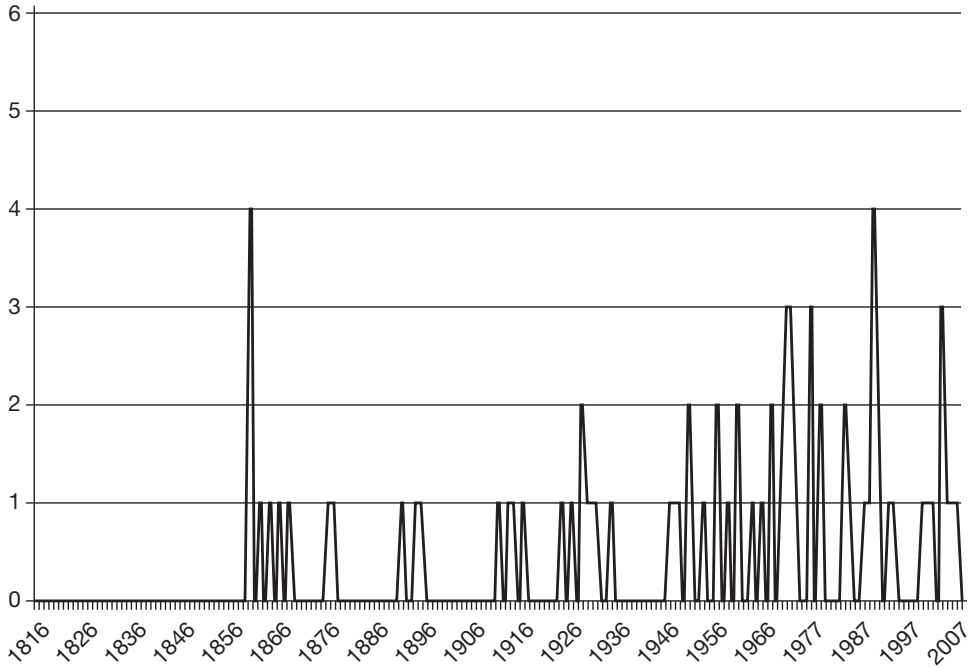


Figure 19.11 Civil war onsets for Asia by year, 1816–2007

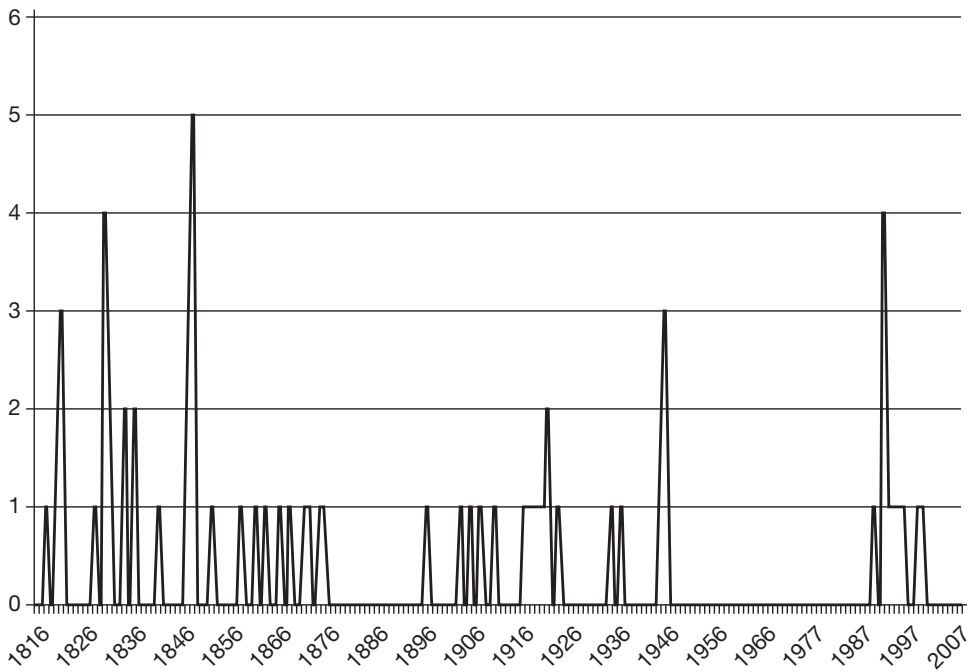


Figure 19.12 Civil war onsets for Europe by year, 1816–2007

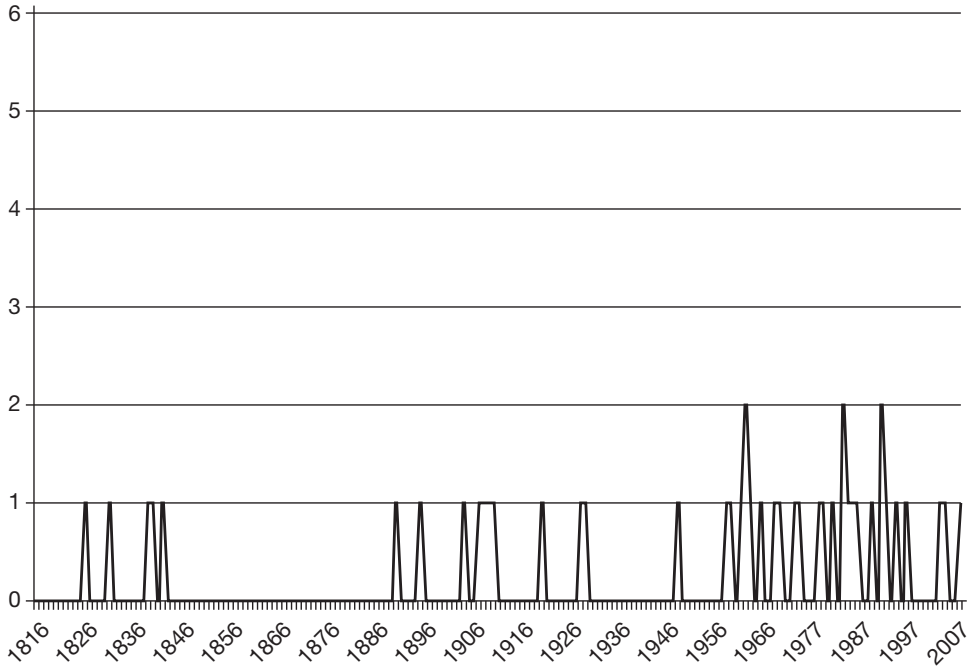


Figure 19.13 Civil war onsets for Middle East by year, 1816–2007

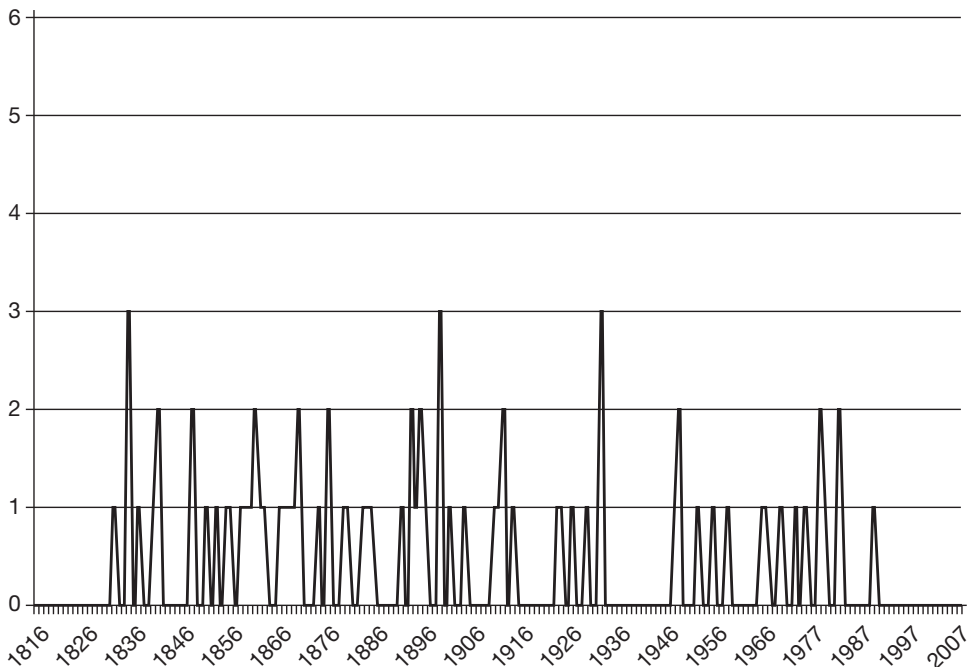


Figure 19.14 Civil war onsets for Western Hemisphere by year, 1816–2007

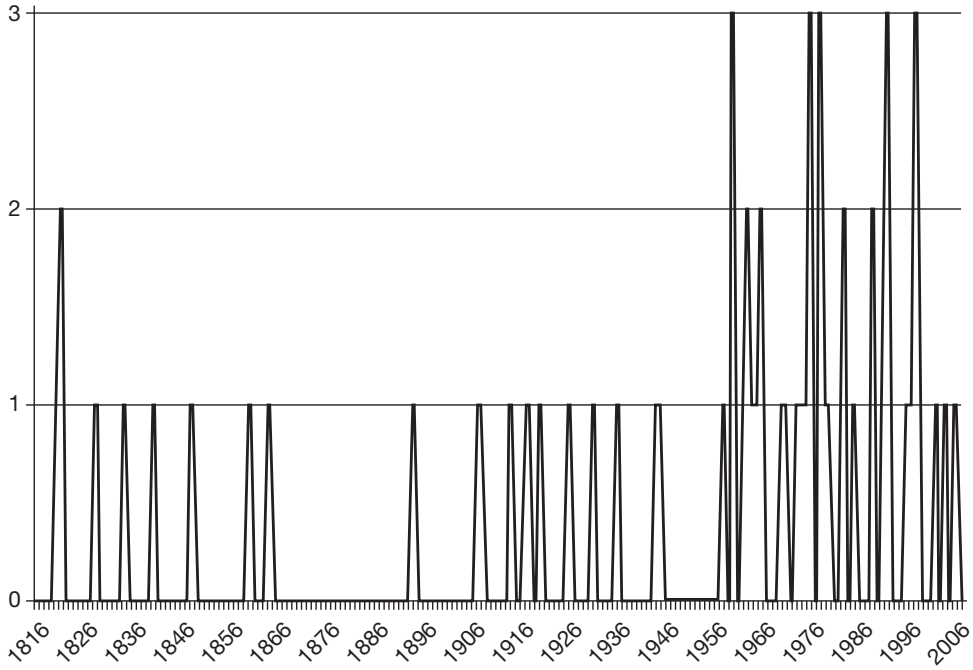


Figure 19.15 Number of internationalized civil war onsets by year, 1816–2007

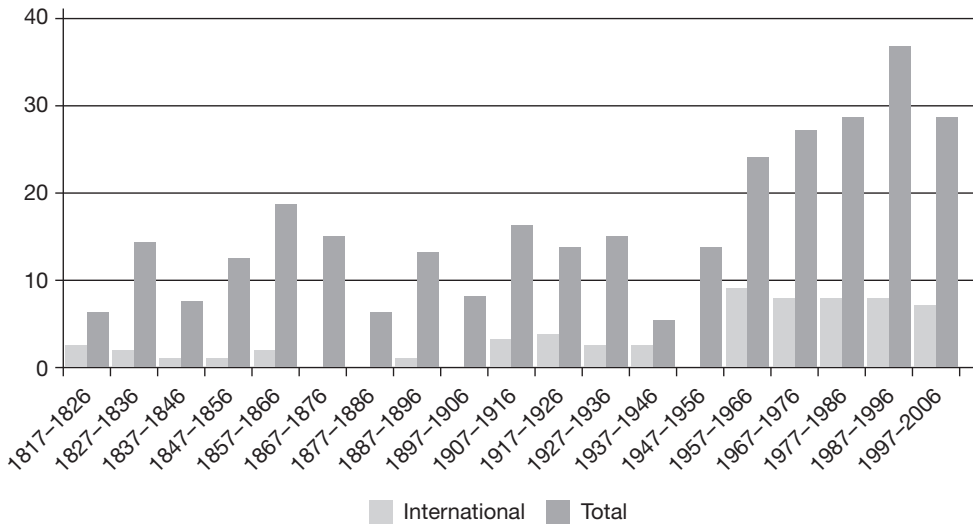


Figure 19.16 Onsets of internationalized civil war by decade, 1817–2006

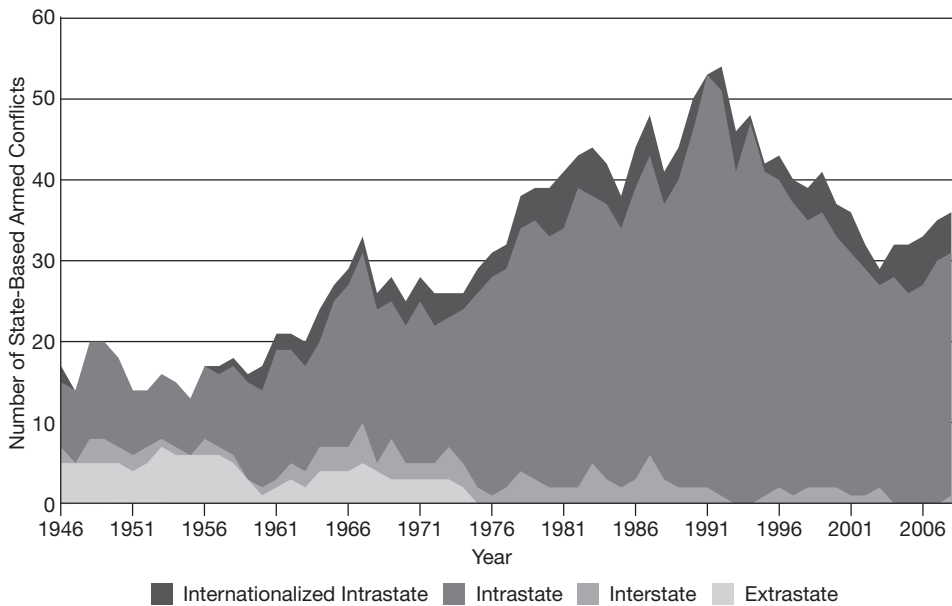
Conclusions

The Human Security Project has reported findings that are at odds with those presented above. Its various versions of the *Human Security Report* (which rely on the UCDP/PRIO data) have highlighted a recent downward trend in both inter-state and intra-state conflicts (though for slightly different timeframes), and thus have been widely cited in the “Democratic Peace” literature (for a discussion see Sarkees, 2013). In the foreword to the 2009–2010 *Human Security Report* (Human Security Project, 2011: v), former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan provided the following description of the recent changes in warfare:

The world has become much less insecure over the past 20 years. This study provides the first comprehensive analysis of this remarkable change. It shows how international wars have declined from an average of some seven a year in the 1950s to less than one a year in the new millennium – a decline that has saved millions of lives.

And with the end of the Cold War came another radical change. Civil war numbers started to drop sharply, with the deadliest conflicts – those killing 1,000 or more people a year – declining by more than 70 percent between 1988 and 2008.

The report provided the chart in Figure 19.17 to illustrate the data behind these claims, and in particular the “the dramatic and unexpected decline in the number of civil conflicts that started in the early 1990s” (Human Security Project, 2011: 5). Figure 19.17 shows armed conflicts (battle-deaths of at least 25) from 1946 onward. The data concerning the purported decline in civil wars was not presented.



Data Source: UCDP/PRIO.
Published in the *Human Security Report 2009/2010*.

Figure 19.17 Trends in state-based armed conflicts by type, 1946–2009
Source: Human Security Project, 2011: 160.

Trying to compare the trends that we see in COW civil wars with those of the *Human Security Report* is complicated by many of the definitional and coding rule differences discussed above. The most significant difference is the timeframe and the duration of the reported trends. The *Human Security Report* emphasizes a decline of intra-state conflicts over the period of about ten years, and extrapolation from such a small period means that significance of such a decline may be overstated. In contrast, the longer historical perspective inherent in the COW data on civil wars provides evidence of a relative constancy in the global experience of war. From this perspective it is clear that the number of civil war onsets rises and falls with great frequency, which is a pattern that is missed by those who highlight trends within shorter timeframes. The lack of consistency in terminology in the *Human Security Report* is also problematic, specifically in terms of the lack of definitions for “intra-state” and “civil” wars (though these appear to be used interchangeably). It is also not clear what the trends in the *Report* represent, whether the number of conflict onsets, the number of conflicts in progress, rolling averages, or something else.

The comprehensive war typology and the data from the COW project has held up well through the project’s 50-year history. The project’s specific focus on high intensity (or high fatality) conflict, or war; the utilization of the war as the unit of analysis; and the definition of war based on the battle-deaths of combatants combine to provide a basis upon which similar armed conflicts can be examined over long historical periods. The structure of the data also allows researchers the option of easily aggregating or disaggregating the war data and examining trends in a number of historical periods. As intra-state wars become increasingly common, COW’s enumeration of four sub-types of intra-state war provides a means by which this classification can be studied in greater detail. As noted above, there are interesting differences in the civil war trends over time within the various global regions and between the major types of civil war that raise questions for future research concerning the stability of states and the proliferation of non-state armed groups capable of engaging in war. Furthermore, the increasing propensity of states to intervene militarily in the civil wars of others suggests perhaps a substitutability of war behavior. All in all, this analysis does not promote optimism about the trends in civil war for the remainder of the twenty-first century. The *Human Security Report’s* (2011) emphasis on the decline in civil war since the end of the Cold War ignores the fact that civil war onsets (even after the highpoints of 1989 and 1991) are at historically high levels with an average of 2.8 civil war onsets per year from 1992 to 2007 (compared to the yearly average of 1.6 onsets from 1816 to 2007). These figures hardly portend the end of civil war.

Notes

- 1 See the Correlates of War *State System Membership Data*, online at www.correlatesofwar.org, for a listing of the members of the system.
- 2 The data, version 4.1, is available at the Correlates of War website: www.correlatesofwar.org.
- 3 For an example of difficulties in determining fatality figures, see the discussion about the Forest Brethren War, COW intra-state war #723 in Gediminas (2012) and Sarkees (2012).

References

- CERAC (2008) *Colombia Conflict Database*. Release 8, January 11. Online: www.cerac.org.co.
- Dixon, J. (2003) “Suggested Changes to the COW Civil War Dataset 3.0.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Portland, Oregon, February 25–March 1.
- Dixon, J. (2009) “What Causes Civil Wars? Integrating Quantitative Research Findings.” *International Studies Review* 11(4): 707–35.
- Eberwein, W.D. and Chojnacki, S. (2001) “Scientific Necessity and Political Utility: A Comparison of Data on Violent Conflicts.” Discussion paper P01–304. Berlin: Arbeitsgruppe: Internationale Politik.

- Gediminas, V. (2012) "'Forest Brothers' and the Consequences of the Metropole–Periphery Distinction Elimination in the 'Correlates of War' Typology." *Journal of Baltic Studies* 43(4): 515–27.
- Gleditsch, N.P., Wallensteen, P., Eriksson, M., Sollenberg, M., and Strand, H. (2002) "Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5): 615–37.
- Gohdes, A. and Price, M. (2012) "First Things First: Assessing Data Quality before Model Quality." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, published online, November 15, doi: 10.1177/0022002712459708.
- Human Security Project (2011) *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kalyvas, S.N. (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lacina, B. and Gleditsch, N.P. (2005) "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths." *European Journal of Population/Revue Européenne de Démographie* 21(2): 145–66.
- Lacina, B. and Gleditsch, N.P. (2012) "The Waning of War is Real: A Response to Gohdes and Price." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, published online November 15, doi:10.1177/0022002712459709.
- Lacina, B., Gleditsch, N.P., and Russett, B. (2006) "The Declining Risk of Death in Battle." *International Studies Quarterly* 50(3): 673–80.
- Maoz, Z. (2007) Unpublished memo to Correlates of War Community.
- Mason, T.D., Weingarten, Jr. J.P., and Fett, P.J. (1999) "Win Lose, or Draw: Predicting the Outcomes of Civil Wars." *Political Research Quarterly* 52(2): 239–68.
- Regan, P. (1996) "Conditions of Successful Third-party Intervention in Intrastate Wars." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40(2): 336–59.
- Richardson, L.F. (1960) *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*, Pittsburgh: Boxwood.
- Russett, B.M., Singer, J.D., and Small, M. (1968) "National Political Units in the Twentieth Century: A Standardized List." *American Political Science Review* 62(3): 932–51.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2000) "The Correlates of War Data on War: An Update to 1997." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 18(1): 123–44.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2001) "Conflict Data: Correlates of War." Presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Chicago, February.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2003) "Assessing Trends in War" presented on the panel *Grand Strategy in the 21st Century*, at the joint meeting of International Security Studies Section and International Security and Arms Control, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA. October 30–November 1.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2004a) "Inter-State, Intra-State and Extra-State Wars: A Comprehensive Look at Their Distribution over Time, 1816–1997." In *War*, by Paul Diehl, ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2004b) "A Comparison of War Datasets." Presented at the University of Michigan, September 17.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2009) "Intra-state Wars (Version 4.0): Definitions and Variables." Posted online at www.correlatesofwar.org.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2010a) "Chapter 2: Defining and Categorizing War," in M.R. Sarkees and F.W. Wayman (2010) *Resort to War 1816–2007*, Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2010b) "Chapter 5: The Intra-State Wars," in M.R. Sarkees and F.W. Wayman (2010) *Resort to War 1816–2007*, Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2010c) "Chapter 7: What Do We Know About War?" in M.R. Sarkees and F.W. Wayman (2010) *Resort to War 1816–2007*, Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2010d) "The COW Typology of War: Defining and Categorizing Wars (Version 4 of the Data)." Online: [www.correlatesofwar.org/Available Data Sets](http://www.correlatesofwar.org/AvailableDataSets).
- Sarkees, M.R. (2012) "Response to the 'Forest Brothers' and the Consequences of the Metropole–Periphery Distinction Elimination in the 'Correlates of War' Typology." *Journal of Baltic Studies* 43(4): 528–38.
- Sarkees, M.R. (2013) "J. David Singer and the Democratic Peace." In Daniel S. Geller and Paul F. Diehl "The Forum: Reflections and Reassessments on the Early Work and Ideas of J. David Singer," *International Studies Review* 15(2): 259–84.
- Sarkees, M.R. and Singer, J.D. (2000) "Status Inconsistency and War Onset." Presented at the European Conference for Political Research, Copenhagen, April.
- Sarkees, M.R. and Singer, J.D. (2001) "Armed Conflict Past and Future: A Master Typology?" Presented at the European Union Conference, Identifying Wars: Systematic Conflict Research and its Utility in Conflict Resolution and Prevention, Uppsala, Sweden, June.
- Sarkees, M.R. and Wayman, F.W. (2010) *Resort to War 1816–2007*, Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Sarkees, M.R., Wayman, F.W., and Singer, J.D. (2003) "Inter-State, Intra-State and Extra-State Wars: A Comprehensive Look at Their Distribution over Time, 1816–1997." *International Studies Quarterly* 47(1): 49–79.
- Singer, J.D. and Small, M. (1972) *The Wages of War, 1816–1965: A Statistical Handbook*. New York: John Wiley.
- Small, M. and Singer, J.D. (1982) *Resort to Arms: International and Civil War, 1816–1980*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.