The New New Civil Wars

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The New New Civil Wars[1]

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The Phenomenon

Something new is happening in the world of civil wars. After declining in the 1990s, the number of active civil wars has significantly increased since 2003.[2] Over the past thirteen years, large-scale civil wars have broken out in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Chad, Mali, the Central African Republic and Ukraine while new civil wars threaten to break out in Turkey and Egypt.[3] These post-2003 conflicts are different from previous civil wars in three important ways. First, the majority of them are situated in Muslim-majority countries.[4] Between 1989-2003, approximately 40 percent of civil war episodes were fought in states in which Muslims made up a majority of citizens. Since 2003, that number has risen to about 65 percent. Second, the vast majority of rebel groups fighting these wars espouse radical Islamist goals.[5] This is quite different from previous civil wars, especially since the end of the Cold War, in which factions tended to form along ethnic and socio-economic lines and did not represent the ideological extreme. Finally, of the radical groups fighting these wars, most are pursuing transnational rather than national aims. In previous wars, rebel

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[1] This name is borrowed from Michael Lewis' book, *The New New Thing: A Silicon Valley Story*, which described the culture of rapid innovation and entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley in the 1990s.
[2] Sebastian von Einsiedel, "Major Recent Trends in Violent Conflict," UN University Centre for Policy Research. Occasional Paper, November 2014, p. 2.
[3] This list is generated by summing across all civil war entries in the UCDP dataset in which the episode state date, as coded by the variable "stardate2", is > 2002.
[4] Gleditsch & Rudolfsen 2015; Gates, Nygard Strand and Urdal, Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946-2014.
[5] Data sources: Gleditsch & Rudolfsen 2015; UCDP-PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4 -2015; Pew Research Center http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/table-muslim-population-by-country/; http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in-percentages/

groups sought control of the central government or territorial separation from the state, not the creation of a worldwide entity governed by a single supreme leader. These three patterns are striking and suggest that we are in the midst of a new wave of civil wars that we do not yet fully understand.

These "new new" civil wars— all but one of which are being fought in Africa, the Middle East, or South Asia—are troubling for at least three reasons. First, they have the characteristics of wars that tend to last a long time: multiple fighting factions (Cunningham 2006), significant outside involvement (Regan 2002, Balch-Lindsay & Enterline 2000, Elbadawi & Sambanis 2000), and deep societal divisions (Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom, 2004). Each of these attributes has been found to increase the duration of civil wars, and all are present in the current wave of civil wars, especially Chad, the DRC, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, the CAR, Mali, Ukraine and South Sudan. The existing research on the duration of civil war, therefore, suggests that these new wars are likely to be long ones.

Second, these wars are also likely to resist negotiated settlements. Existing studies have found that combatants are much more likely to sign and implement peace agreements if a third party is willing to commit long-term peacekeepers to help implement the deal (Walter 1997, 2002; Doyle and Sambanis, 2000; Fortna 2004). One of the problems with this new wave of civil wars, however, is that no state or international organization has currently shown any interest in providing this service. The American public, for example, is vehemently opposed to sending American soldiers back into any conflict zone (Berinsky 2007; Gallup 2013), and the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are not in agreement about how these wars should end. This suggests that the combatants in each of these wars will be required to resolve these conflicts by themselves, either through decisive military victories or through negotiated settlements that they will have to enforce.

Third, these wars are occurring in regions where neighboring countries have many of the risk factors associated with civil war and are, therefore, in danger of contagion. Jordan, Bahrain, Algeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt all have a history of authoritarian regimes, practicing exclusionary politics, that are known for corrupt and bad governance (Buhaug 2006; Fearon 2010; Walter 2010; Cederman et al., and Braithwaite 2010). Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have the added challenge of having to absorb millions of Syrian refugees, an event which existing research has found to be deeply destabilizing (Salehyan 2006; Salehyan & Gleditsch 2006; Gleditsch 2007). These dangers suggest that we are entering a period of sustained growth for civil wars, not a period of increasing peace.

The purpose of this article is twofold. The first is to begin to analyze these new trends with an eye to revealing what our current theories can and cannot explain about them. The second goal is to offer a new theoretical framework to begin to explain why we are seeing an increase in civil wars, especially those fought in Muslim countries, by radical Islamist groups, seeking global aims.

I begin by highlighting three distinct waves of civil wars since the end of World War II: one that began around 1951 and ended with the close of the Cold War, a second that began around 1992 and ended sometime after 2001, and a third wave that began with the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and continues today. Each of these periods is distinguished by civil wars with their own distinct attributes. These attributes have shaped how we understand civil wars and have influenced the scholarship that has resulted. The post WWII wave of civil wars, for example, was dominated by class-based rebellions that elicited a wave of corresponding research focused on peasant mobilization and revolution (Gurr 1970; Scott 1976; Tilly 1978; Popkin 1979; Wood 2003; Petersen 2006). Wars in the 1990's were dominated by ethnically based conflicts, many of them separatist in orientation, that prompted a significant body of research on the role of ethnicity and identity in civil wars (Ellingsen 2000; Quinn, Hechter & Wibbels 2003; Cederman & Girardin 2007; Fearon, Kasara & Laitin 2007; Wucherpfennig et al. 2012; Denny & Walter 2014). We are now in a

new phase of civil war, where religion and ideology appear to play a predominant role, and where a new technology – the internet – appears to influence behavior in novel and unexplored ways. This new wave will reveal the boundaries of our existing knowledge of political violence and will demand additional research on the role of ideology and information technology in multiple dimensions of civil war.

In what follows, I lay out these three waves of civil wars in greater detail, focusing most heavily on the third and current wave. I then outline what our existing theories have to say about this new phase and what still needs to be explained. The article ends by offering a theory for why so many of today's civil wars are centered in Muslims majority countries, why so many are fought by groups that embrace radical Islamist ideologies, and why their aims extend far beyond any single state.

Before continuing, I should be clear on what this article does not do. This article is by no means an exhaustive list of all the excellent research that has been done on civil wars to date. In fact, there has been an abundance of truly outstanding work produced over the last ten years that I will not have a chance to discuss. This includes group-level research on rebel organization (Krause 2013/14; Staniland 2014); rebel alliances (Akcinaroglu 2012; Christia 2012; Posner 2004; CKurtado 2007; Seymour 2014), rebel fractionalization (Woldemarian 2011; Warren & Troy 2014), rebel on rebel fighting (Cunningham, Bakke & Seymour 2012; Nygard & Weintraub 2014; Fjelde & Nilsson 2012; Warren & Troy 2014) and rebel treatment of civilians (Wood, Kathman & Gent 2012; Wood 2010, 2014; Hultman 2012; Fjelde & Hultman 2014; Metelits 2010; Weinstein 2007; Balcells 2010; Ottomann 2015; Salehyan, Siroky & Wood 2014; Humphreys & Weinstein 2006; Stewart 2015; Flanigan 2008; Taydas & Peksen 2012). It also includes micro-level research on individual's decisions to join insurgencies (Weinstein 2006; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008), commit atrocities including rape (Wood 2009; Cohen 2013), resist rebels (Arjona 2014) and demobilize and integrate into society (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007; Annan et al. 2011).

This article is also not an exhaustive examination of all the questions that still need to be answered or the research that still needs to be done. Volumes could be written on the role of women and women's status on issues of global conflict. The same could be said about the effects of environmental stress and climate change on stability and security. We are also just starting to seriously investigate the effects of food and water insecurity on violence and state stability. And multiple questions could be posed on the effects of aging populations and shrinking working age populations on conflict. This article, therefore, just scratches the surface of all the important issues that could and should be studied more deeply.

Finally, this article also hasn't addressed the explosion of data we are experiencing.[6] We are in a period of data abundance where information is coming online faster than we can analyze it. New types of data (observational, events, geo-spatial, big data) will allow for a wealth of groundbreaking studies, especially at the group and individual level. This surge of material offers an unprecedented opportunity for researchers to ground social science theory in high quality data and in the process make real advances in our knowledge of significant real-world events. This article is simply an attempt to identify some of the biggest trends and most pressing problems for which people and policy makers are currently seeking answers.

Three Waves of Civil War

Figure 1 reveals the three distinct waves of civil wars that have occurred between 1946 to 2014. Wave one began shortly after World War II and ended around 1991. Wave two began around 1992 and ended shortly after 2001. And wave three began around 2003 and continues

[6] For this, see the excellent review article by Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, "New Trends in Civil War Data: Geography, Organizations, and Events," 2014.

today.

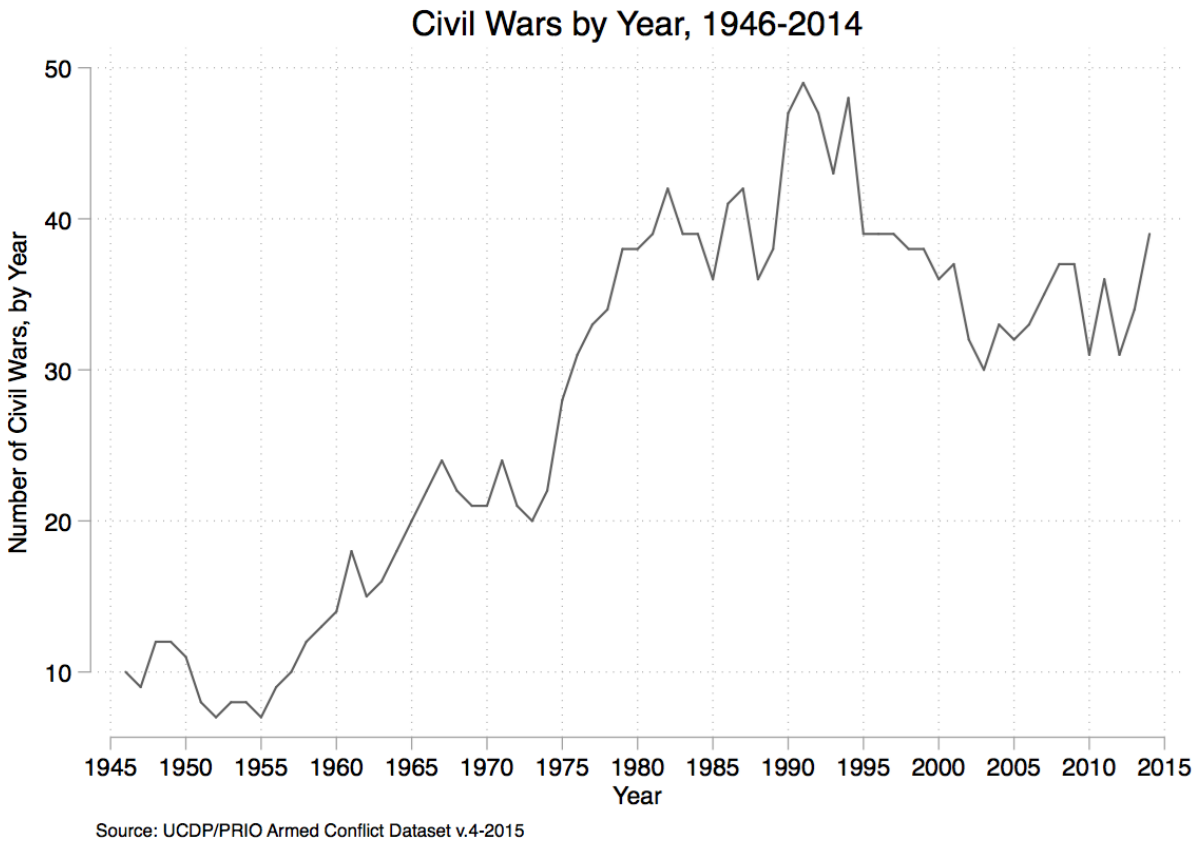


Figure one reveals that wave one was the longest and most distinctive phase to date, coinciding almost exactly with the Cold War period and characterized by steady growth in the number of civil wars. On the surface, the reason for this increase is fairly easy to explain: more civil wars were starting during this period than were ending (Fearon 2004). Below the surface, however, two important phenomena were transpiring to encourage so many civil wars to begin. The first was the end of colonialism. In the 30-year period between 1950 and 1980, Western governments withdrew from their African and Asian colonies, leaving behind weak regimes open to contestation. The decision by Portugal to relinquish its colonies in 1975, for example, led to the immediate outbreak of civil wars in Angola and Mozambique as competing domestic factions fought

to control these newly independent states. Part of the increase in civil wars during this time, therefore, was the transformation of former colonial wars into active civil wars.

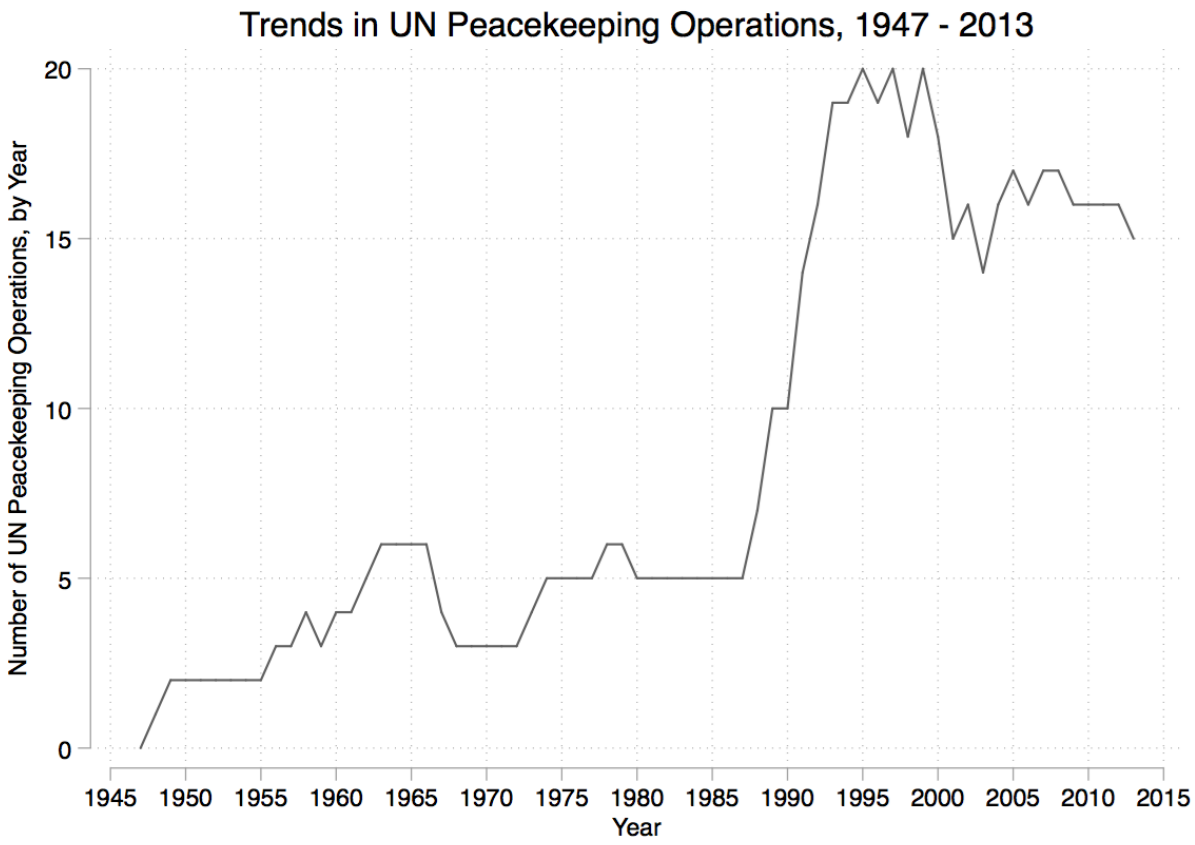
The second phenomenon driving this increase was the Cold War rivalry that developed between the Soviet Union and the United States. Until the late 1980s, both Moscow and Washington eagerly channeled equipment and funds to opposing sides fighting civil wars in an effort to influence the ideological balance around the world. Rebels and governments fighting civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, Laos, Guatemala, Burma, the Philippines, Afghanistan, and Peru all benefited from this Cold War proxy funding. The result was a wave of new civil wars that tended to break down along class lines and be heavily funded by the superpowers (Russett 1964; Huntington 1968 & 1993; Gurr 1971; Paige 1975; Scott 1976; Muller 1985; Kalyvas & Balcells 2010; Evangelista 1996; Kanet 2006; and Kirkpatrick 1989).

The second wave of civil wars began with the end of the Cold War and lasted until approximately 2003. This was a period of retrenchment: more civil wars were ending than were beginning. The defining feature of this phase was the large number of civil wars - many of them long-standing - that were being resolved in negotiated settlements. Combatants in countries such as Cambodia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Croatia, Mozambique, and Bosnia had two reasons to pursue peace agreements at this time. The first was the end of easy financing from the Soviet Union and the United States (Byman et. al. 2001; Kalyvas & Balcells 2010). The Contra rebels, for example, had no real interest in negotiating with the Nicaraguan government until Washington discontinued aid in 1985. Once money dried up, combatants suddenly had incentives to cooperate.

The second was the rise of a unified and activist U.N. Security Council willing to approve peacekeeping operations to support these settlements. Combatants who were willing to negotiate peace agreements suddenly had a third party willing to help them implement the terms (Walter

1997, 2002; Doyle and Sambanis, 200x; Fortna 2004). The result was a slew of peace agreements that were not only signed, but were actually executed.

Figure 2 reveals the large increase in the number of U.N. peacekeeping operations between 1989 and 2000, a period that coincided almost exactly with the drop in the number of civil wars during that time. Together, the removal of external financing for civil wars and the rise in the availability of peacekeepers meant that a negotiated settlement became a more attractive option for many combatants than continued fighting. The result was fewer civil wars.



Source: IPI Peacekeeping Database. http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/contributions/

The third distinct wave of civil wars began around 2003 when the number of civil wars that were starting once again outpaced the number of civil wars that were ending. Two phenomena likely accounted for this increase. The first was the decline in the number of civil wars ending in

negotiated settlements. After an activist period in the 1990s, U.N. peacekeeping operations fell off, leading to fewer successfully implemented peace agreements. But there was an additional reason why the number of civil wars rose after 2003. Longstanding authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa that had once seemed invincible faced the possibility of collapse. The U.S. decision to topple Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the wave of Arab Spring protests of 2011 created a collection of vulnerable and unstable governments across these regions. The result was the outbreak of civil war in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen and the expansion of al Qa'ida into countries such as Chad, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia.

This third wave of civil wars is unique in at least three ways. As Table 1 reveals, these new civil wars are located mostly in countries with large Muslim populations.[7] Of the 16 large-scale civil wars that started since 2003, 10 of them (63%) are in Muslim majority countries or countries with parity between Muslims and non-Muslims. This includes Chad, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Israel/Palestine and Mali. The only post-2003 civil wars that have not been in countries with large Muslim populations are those in the DRC, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Ukraine, and the CAR. Table 1 lists all civil wars since 2003, their starting date, the percent of the population that is Muslim, and whether the rebellion was Islamist or not.

Table 1: Large-Scale Civil Wars Started Since 2003

Location	Episode Start Date	Muslim Majority Country	Muslim Population %	Islamist Rebellion
Iraq	2004	Yes	99	Yes
Chad	2005	Yes	56	No
Sri Lanka	2005	No	9	No
Somalia	2006	Yes	99	Yes
Pakistan	2007	Yes	96	Yes
Rwanda	2009	No	2	No
Yemen (North Yemen)	2009	Yes	99	Yes
Syria	2011	Yes	93	Yes

[7] Gleditsch & Rudolfsen 2015.

Libya	2011	Yes	97	No
Nigeria	2011	Parity	50	Yes
South Sudan	2011	No	6	No
Central Africa Republic	2012	No	15	No
Mali	2012	Yes	90	Yes
DR Congo	2012	No	1.4	No
Israel/Palestine	2014	Parity	49*	Yes
Ukraine	2014	No	.9	No

* This number includes Muslims living in the West Bank and Gaza.

A second defining feature of this third phase of civil wars is the large proportion of rebel groups that espouse radical Islamist ideas and goals. In fact, many of these civil wars appear to be dominated by a particularly extreme type of Islamist group –Salafi-Jihadists – an ultra-conservative reform movement that not only seeks to institute sharia law, but also to establish a transnational caliphate based on Sunni dominance. Salafi-Jihadists reject democracy as well as Shia rule and believe that jihad in the form of violence and terrorism is justified in pursuit of their goals. Salafi-Jihadi groups account for approximately 35% of all major militant groups in Iraq, 50% of all major militant groups in Somalia, and 70% of all militant groups in Syria.[8]

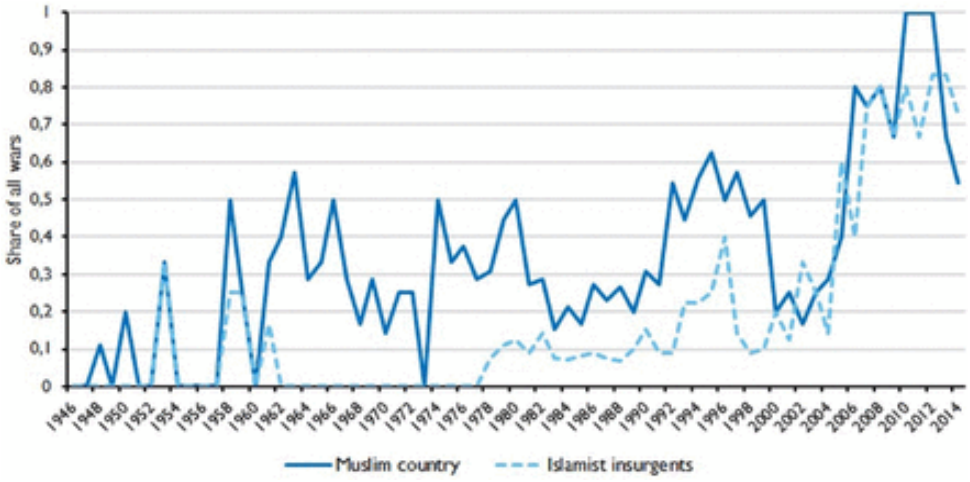
Part of what is driving the growth of Salafi-Jihadist groups is the emergence of al Qa'ida and its strategy of building a global international terrorist network by co-opting and cooperating with like-minded jihadist groups around the world. Since the early 1990s, al Qa'ida has formed relationships with groups from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, Eritrea, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. It has also supported efforts in the Balkans, Central Asia, Chechnya and the

[8] The Islamic State, al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and the Abu Sayyaf Group are just a few of the most prominent organizations that identify along Salafi-Jihadi lines. Source: Mapping Militant Organizations, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/. Only two groups are Salafi-Jihadist in Pakistan, however, Pakistan and Afghanistan include the Deobandi tradition – another fundamentalist group that adopts violent means to achieve ambition – is dominant in that part of the world. Notably, though, Deobandi cross national ambitions are much more muted.

Philippines. In short, much of the expansion of radical Islamist groups around the world appears to be the result of al Qa'ida's policy of expanding its influence via alliance-building.[9]

Figure 3 shows the share of all civil wars taking place in Muslim countries and the share of insurgents that are Islamists in these wars. It reveals the increasing dominance of Muslim countries on the civil war landscape and the central role Islamist insurgents play in fighting these wars.

Figure 3: Share of Civil Wars in Muslim Countries & Share of Islamist Insurgents



Source: Gleditsch & Rudolfsen, 2015

A third defining characteristic of the current wave of civil wars is the transnational nature of rebel goals. Salafi-Jihadists have global aims; their objectives are not limited to a single government, in a single country, or a single region. Their goals are to erase international boundaries and create a world-wide government. ISIS, for example, pursues these goals by aligning with "Global Affiliates" - groups that have pledged allegiance and support for ISIS – and it has found willing partners in Sudan, Philippines, India, Algeria, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Libya, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Indonesia, Tunisia, Russia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia.

[9] See Thomas Joscelyn, "Global al Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges," *Testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade*. July 18, 2013.

The transnational nature of these goals means that groups such as ISIS and al Qa'ida threaten a larger number of people in a greater number of countries than any group in the past. It also means that the resources from which they can draw both in terms of money and human capital are likely to be deeper and more extensive, making them a more formidable foe.[10]

What Our Current Theories Have to Say About These New Trends

Why So Many Civil Wars in Muslim Countries?

Our current theories can explain some of what is going on in this third wave of civil wars but not everything. Existing macro-level studies help illuminate why so many civil wars have broken out in Muslim majority countries. Chad, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Nigeria, Chad, Mali, CAR and Yemen are all countries where GDP per capita is low, unemployment is high, and governments are repressive, corrupt and unconcerned with the rule of law. These are all factors that have been found to increase the risk of civil war (Hegre et al. 2001; Sambanis 2002; Fearon & Laitin 2003; Collier & Hoeffler 2004; Buhaug 2006; Fearon 2010; Walter 2014). Citizens in so many Muslim countries likely rebelled in large part because the leaders of these states were some of the most repressive and authoritarian in the world, not because these countries were Muslim.

Still, this doesn't explain the timing of these wars. The governments of North Africa, West Africa and the Middle East have been highly repressive and authoritarian since they were formed after WWII and many of them have been ruled by the same leader for decades.[11] In addition, there are other repressive, corrupt and poverty-striken states that are not in the Muslim world that did not experience rebellion. What, then, accounts for the outbreak of these wars, in these countries, starting in 2003?

[10] ISIS for example, successfully recruited approximately 15,000 foreign fighters from mid-2013 until the end of 2014. Dodwell et. al. *The Caliphate's Global Workforce: An Inside Look at the Islamic State's Foreign Fighter Paper Trail*. April 2016.

[11] This includes Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, and Syria.

Existing macro-level theories that point to the role of state capacity in deterring rebellion partly answer this question (Fearon & Laitin 2003; Collier & Hoeffler 2002). The U.S. decision to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein in 2003, and the Arab Spring demonstrations that began in 2011 created an opening for political actors to compete for power. Leaders who had once seemed unbeatable disappeared overnight or were revealed to have far less support from their own citizens and military elites than had once been assumed (Bellin 2012; Stepan & Linz 2013). The result was a wave of protests and uprisings from individuals demanding change.

But civil wars broke out in only four countries that experienced popular demonstrations (Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen), not all of them. Existing bargaining theories can, perhaps, fill in some of the remaining gap. Bargaining theories contend that civil wars are much more likely to break out in countries where government leaders are unwilling or unable to negotiate with challengers. President Assad of Syria, President Gaddafi of Libya, and incumbent leaders in Iraq and Yemen could have avoided civil war had they been willing to make sufficient concessions to placate protesters. This is exactly what King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia did when he increased the economic stipends to Saudi citizens following protests in 2011 and 2012. It is also what President Ben Ali of Tunisia and President Mubarak of Egypt did when they agreed to step down from power. Governments that refused to offer any concessions to the protesters were the ones that were forced to fight.

But why would some leaders refuse to make allowances? If leaders such as Gaddafi and Assad had the ability to avoid war via negotiations, why did they choose not to? According to Fearon (1995) and Powell (2006), one of the main reasons violence occurs is because warring parties cannot credibly commit to share power with each other over time. The decision by some Arab leaders not to negotiate was likely made in large part because these leaders faced severe commitment problems stemming from deep demographic imbalances in their countries. In Syria, the minority Alawite regime of President Assad had incentives to fight a civil war because it could

not trust the far larger Sunni majority to continue to share power in the future. In Iraq, the minority Sunnis couldn't trust the more numerous Sh'ia population to honor any promise to share oil revenue and political control once in power. The choice for leaders like Assad and Gaddafi was not whether to reform or fight, it was whether to be ousted from power (and likely imprisoned or killed) or fight to retain full control. Most minority-in-power regimes chose to fight.

What We Still Don't Know

Existing theories help explain the broad outlines of this third wave of civil wars - why it broke out in predominantly Muslim countries, in the late 2000s, and only in some Arab-Spring countries – but they don't explain at least two big, new patterns we are observing.

Why the Proliferation of Radical Jihadists?

For reasons we have not yet identified, the number of rebel groups espousing extreme ideologies, especially the radical Islamist ideology we call Salafi-Jihadism, has increased.[12] By extreme I mean ideological extremism, where a rebel group pursues an ideology that is more extreme than the majority opinion of the population it seeks to rule (Lake 2002). Salafi-Jihadists favor a stricter interpretation of Islam than the bulk of society in the countries they seek to control. This makes the growth and spread of these groups particularly puzzling. Most Muslims surveyed have expressed disdain for groups such as ISIS. A 2015 Pew Study of 11 countries with significant Muslim populations, found that "in no country surveyed did more than 15% of the population show favorable attitudes toward Islamic State."[13] Why have radical jihadists done so well since the early 2000s when most Muslim citizens have unfavorable opinions of them?

Currently, we know very little about the role of ideology in civil war, especially extreme ideology. We do not know, for example, whether rebel leaders embrace a particular ideology for its own sake—because they genuinely believe in such ideas—or for more instrumental reasons—

[12] Gleditsch and Rudolfson, 2015.
[13] Jacob Poushter, "In nations with significant Muslim populations, much disdain for ISIS," Pew Research center, November 17, 2015.

because ideology helps solve certain practical problems related to recruitment and retention. We also do not know why some ideologies emerge and resonate at some times and places but not others. What we do know is that the more extreme groups in this current wave of civil wars - especially the Salafi-Jihadists – are flourishing in ways that more moderate groups are not.[14]

Part of the reason for the proliferation of these radical groups could be that other groups observe their success, learn from them and imitate their practices. The better these groups perform in war, the more likely other groups are to copy them. Learning, however, does not explain *why* these groups have had such success. Three different literatures offer potential insights into why more extreme groups appear to have done better in war than more moderate groups. Spatial models of political competition in American politics suggest that an extreme ideological position could give rebel groups a *recruiting advantage* with more devoted and committed supporters.[15] The ideological extreme is where individuals are likely to be more willing to fight and die for a cause.[16] Moderate citizens, by contrast, are likely to be more difficult to recruit because they view the political stakes of victory or defeat as less valuable. According to U.S. House Intelligence committee Chairman, Rep. Mike Rogers: "[c]ertain elements of the [moderate] rebels are reaching across to these jihadist units because they tend to be armed and effective and committed fighters, which is more than they can say for their own units at times."[17] Embracing a radical ideology, therefore, could allow rebel groups to attract the subset of the population that is willing to fight longer and harder for a cause.

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[14] Salafi-Jihadists, such as Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have been more successful in obtaining recruits, financing, and territory than their moderate competitors. There is a staggering lack of data on terrorist recruitment and financing. The best we have to date is Shapiro, Shatz, and Jung, forthcoming.
[15] Iannaccone, Lawrence R. and Eli Berman. 2006. "Religious Extremists: The Good, the Bad and the Deadly." *Public Choice* 128(1-2): 109-129. See also Berman 2003; Berman & Laitin 20087; Berman 2011. See also Orit Kedar 2005 on why moderate voters prefer extreme parties.
[16] See Walter & Kydd 2017 for a more in-depth analysis of the connection between an extreme ideology and rebel recruitment. See also Gates and Nordas, 2016.
[17] Quoted by Ostovar & McCants, p. 28. Quote taken from Chris Lawrence, "Syrian Rebels said to Cut Deals for Arms from Extremists," CNN 17 October 2012.

The literature on product differentiation from industrial organization offers a second explanation for the success of ideologically extreme groups in civil war. An extreme ideology may help organizations *positively differentiate* themselves from other similar-looking groups and thus carve out a segment of a highly competitive market.[18] One way for groups to differentiate themselves is to take a value that is widely endorsed within a population and position themselves as the most committed defender of that value. In Muslim societies, Islam is such a value. Adopting the position as the "most Islamic" group has advantages. Few potential recruits motivated by a desire to protect Islam will be excited to join the second most Islamic group. The desire to present oneself as the most committed representative of a group, therefore, could spark a race to the ideological extreme, leading to a proliferation of ever-more radical organizations.

Finally, bargaining theory may also help explain the emergence and success of so many radical groups. Rebel groups competing for political control – especially in countries with weak institutions and a history of political corruption - face a potentially debilitating commitment problem. Citizens in these countries know that political elites, once in power, will have few constraints on their abuse of power. Knowing that the opportunity for exploitation is high, potential supporters are likely to try to determine which rebel leaders are less likely to sell-out once in power.[19] Espousing an extreme ideology – such as Salafi-Jihadism – could serve as an effective commitment device because it promises to punish individuals for bad behavior.[20] In this way, rebel leaders can clearly signal that they are more likely to govern honorably once in office, making them potentially more attractive even to moderate citizens.

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[18] Theoretical synergies can be found in the literature on industrial organization. See especially Tirole, 1988.
[19] This mechanism is related to the signaling mechanism identified by Berman (2009) but takes it further. Berman argued that the sacrifices required by fundamentalist organizations helped to screen out unreliable recruits. We argue that sacrifices can serve a wider purpose, enabling a group to credibly commit to policies that enhance the public welfare rather than enrich the organization.
[20] Fearon unpublished paper, 1994. Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem. Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1992. "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and other Collectives." *Journal of Political Economy* 100(2): 271-292; Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan. 2008. "Terrorist Factions," *The Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 3: 399-418. See also Berman 2011: Radical, Religious & Violent.

Why the New Emphasis on Transnational Aims?

All of these theories help explain the proliferation and success of violent extremist groups but not why so many of them have embraced an ideology – Salafi-Jihadism – that emphasizes global aims. They also cannot explain why so many groups have adopted these goals at this particular time. These are the puzzles we still need to solve.

One possible explanation for the rise of globally-oriented groups is that rebel leaders are being strategic about building the largest possible base of support. An appeal to a worldwide Sunni caliphate has the advantage of tapping into an enormous transnational audience. Sunni Islam is the most popular form of Islam, comprising 90 percent of all Muslims and extending across multiple ethnicities and international boundaries. By framing their goals around a transnational Muslim caliphate, rebel leaders have found a way to potentially mobilize millions of people behind a much larger grab for power.[21] In addition, appealing to a sectarian identity that extends across international borders allows groups to recruit money and soldiers from around the world, not just locally. Militant groups in Somalia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh, therefore, not only announce that they are Sunni to appeal to domestic audiences, but also to signal to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates that they welcome their support. The result is more funding and backing from a large, wealthy pool of external patrons.

The Missing Link: Information Technology and Civil War

The biggest gap in our understanding of the new new civil wars, however, has to do with the timing of the emergence of these extreme ideological groups with their transnational aims. The advantages of embracing an extreme ideology have existed long before 2003, yet the proliferation of radical Islamist rebel groups, especially Salafi-Jihadists, is new. The same is true of the advantages of appealing to a global audience. It has always been beneficial to try to recruit from the

[21] The use of transnational ideology is not new. Transnational Sunni Islamism is akin to transnational communism/Marxism during the Cold War. What is new is the oil wealth into which these appeals are likely to connect.

biggest pool of potential volunteers and donors. The fact that these groups are proliferating now suggests that something else is going on.

The invention of information technology, especially the advent of the Web 2.0 in the early 2000s, is the big new innovation that is likely driving many of these changes. Rebel groups are embracing the internet and adapting their strategies and tactics to exploit a radically new information environment and it is this new information technology that likely explains their strategies. In 1998 only 12 terrorist-related websites existed on the internet. By 2003 there were approximately 2,630 sites, and by January 2009 there were 6,940.[22] Today, the number of media sites used by rebel groups and terrorist continues to grow exponentially: in Iraq the number of downloadable posts disseminated by ISIS via official websites, Twitter, Facebook and various social media accounts increased 12-fold between January 2014 and January 2015 alone.[23] What distinguishes this third wave of civil wars from previous waves is that it is the first to be fought in a new information environment that rewards a more extreme and global orientation.

In what follows, I explore six large implications of this new environment on the outbreak, conduct, and resolution of civil wars. In the process, I hope to map an emerging set of research programs to help explain some of the most pressing unanswered questions in the field.

The civil wars that have broken out since 2003 are the first to be fought in a Web 2.0 era of user-generated material. We now live in a world where citizens and elites operate in an interactive internet environment, where anyone with a smartphone can easily produce and disseminate material from almost anywhere on the globe.[24] This new information environment will produce winners and losers and change the dynamics of civil wars in ways we have not yet explored.[25] It

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[22] "The Internet as a Terrorist Tool for Recruitment and Radicalization of Youth," *Department of Homeland Security White Paper*, April 24, 2009, p. 2.
[23] Source: Dataset on Rebel Propaganda, Walter & Phillips, 2016.
[24] Shapiro & Weidman 2015.
[25] Aday, Sean, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, John Kelly & Ethan Zuckerman, *Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics*," United States Institute of Peace, 2010.

used to be, for example, that mass propaganda was out of reach to everyone fighting civil wars except governments. Those who did not control television or radio stations were forced to disseminate propaganda by word of mouth or by hand, greatly limiting their audience and influence. The internet, however, has given even the smallest rebel groups (or even individual) the same access to large audiences as the governments they are seeking to defeat. In addition, the type of information that can be disseminated has also changed. Real-time videos can now be wirelessly posted from battlefields to websites allowing combatants to disseminate material throughout the war even from remote locations. The internet also allows combatants to build networks of individuals – many with the same extreme ideological views – who can easily connect to each other and organize their activities. Individuals and rebel entrepreneurs can now easily link to a virtual community of like-minded citizens around the world, influencing them in ways that was difficult or impossible pre-2003. Add to this the fact that propaganda in an internet age is difficult to stop (governments can't intercept communications without sacrificing everyone's privacy) and it becomes clear that information will become a bigger, not smaller, part of the strategy of war.

Instantaneous, global communication is likely to have at least six major implications for civil wars that will need to be studied in greater detail. First, information technology is likely to benefit individual citizens (especially citizens in highly repressive countries) more than political elites in those countries. Dictators and autocrats will face greater difficulty limiting and controlling the flow of information and the messages their citizens receive. Government elites will also have greater difficulty preventing individuals from coordinating their protest activity. Citizens are likely to be better informed about the behavior of government officials, the well-being of their particular ethnic or sectarian group relative to other groups, and the level and extent of dissatisfaction in society. The result could be a boon for popular demonstrations and grass-roots organizing. Recent micro-level research on the use of twitter by protesters in Egypt, for example, found that social media

allowed protesters to better organize their activity and evade government crackdowns, making spontaneous demonstrations possible (Steinert-Threlkeld 2016).

Second, global internet campaigns are likely to make it more feasible for rebel groups to form, leading to civil wars with a greater number of warring factions.[26] It used to be that rebel entrepreneurs required a base of local support and financing to make mobilization possible. The internet, however, is likely to change this.[27] Internet media campaigns make it easier for rebel entrepreneurs, especially those with limited local backing, to garner international attention and solicit the soldiers and financing necessary to start a war.[28] The result is likely to be greater external involvement in civil wars, in different guises, and a larger number of warring factions. The evidence seems to support this: the average number of rebel groups fighting in civil wars *has* increased over time.[29] In 1950 the average number or rebel groups in civil wars was 8; in 2010 it was 14.

Third, the new information environment also means that rebel groups are likely to have greater incentives to frame their objectives in global terms – something we have observed with the proliferation of Salafi-Jihadist groups. First, the internet allows warring factions to be more ambitious, ignore international borders, and set their sights on affecting large-scale change by drawing on the resources of a globalized world. Second, the internet is likely to reward groups such as al Qa'ida and ISIS with global aims, since they will have a wider audience from which to generate revenue and recruits. In short, the new information environment has shifted the advantage from

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[26] David E. Cunningham. "Veto Players and Civil War Duration." *American Journal of Political Science*. 2006; David E. Cunningham, *Barriers to Peace in Civil War. Cambridge University Press, 2011.;*
Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham. "Actor Fragmentation and Civil War Bargaining: How Internal Divisions Generate Civil Conflict." *American Journal of Political Science*. 2013.
[27] For a description of the dramatic shifts in how rebel leaders can raise and transfer funds, see Michael Jacobson, "Terrorist Financing on the Internet," *CTC Sentinel*, June 2009, Vol. 2, Issue 6, p. 19.
[28] Paul Collier and Ankje Hoeffler**.** **"**Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers.* 2004.
[29] Source: UCDP Dyadic Dataset, v.1-2015. See also Christia 2012.

home-grown groups with local bases of support, to transnational groups with global networks and connections.

Fourth, the internet is likely to make it possible for rebel groups to sustain themselves longer in war. That's because warring parties can now tap into a greater variety of financing that, cumulatively, is likely to be more consistent over time.[30] The decentralized nature of the internet means that rebel groups need no longer be dependent on a single source of income or a single patron. If they lose access to one source of income (i.e., coca) or one patron (i.e., Iran), they still have access to millions of potential individual donors. The easier it is for rebel group to obtain consistent financing, and the easier it is for outsiders to help finance these campaigns, the longer civil wars are likely to be.

Fifth, the internet is likely to make the spread of civil war even more likely. Research has found the civil wars produce a contagion effect; once one civil war breaks out, it increases the risk that civil war breaks out in neighboring countries (Saleyhen and Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan 2006; Gleditsch 2007; Salehyan 2007; Kathman 2010). One of the potential implications of a Web 2.0 world is that ideas and ideology are likely to spread more rapidly and more widely. This occurs in two ways. The first is directly through the dissemination of information via the web, and the second is indirectly through the recruitment of foreign soldiers. ISIS and al Qa'ida, for example, use internet propaganda to recruit foreign fighters from around the world. These fighters then come to active war zones, receive training, indoctrination, and experience, and eventually return home, creating new networks in their native countries.

Finally, the internet could potentially eliminate the restraints rebel and government leaders have to target local citizens with abuse. Studies have found that rebel groups that are reliant on the local population for support or financing are less likely to commit human rights violations (Wood,

[30] Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, & Mans Soderbom, "On the Duration of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research*, 2004.

2014). Conversely, rebel groups that receive significant material support from external patrons are more likely to use violence toward civilians (Wood 2010; Weinstein 2007; Salehyan, Siroky and Wood, 2014). Rebel groups in the current civil wars appear to be following this pattern. In Iraq, ISIS, Jubhat an-Nusra, and the al-Mahdi army all enjoyed significant financing from outside and all have been significantly more likely to target civilians with violence than groups that did not.[31] By freeing combatants from the need to solicit local support, the internet may also be freeing them to engage in more civilian abuse.

These six implications only scratch the surface of the many ways information and communication technology (ICT) is likely to affect the strategies and tactics of political players competing for power. Players at every level of a conflict – citizens, protesters, rebel leaders, rebel organizations, societal groups, governments, and external states – are likely to be affected by advances in information technology. In addition, innovations in ICT will play a multifaceted role at every stage of conflict - from protest, to violence, to civil war - and the implications will be far-ranging. It is now easier for individuals to obtain information about their government and each other. It is easier for them to coordinate themselves in protest. It is easier for rebel groups to form and sustain themselves.[32] And it is easier for outside players – individuals, radical organizations, and states - to intervene in these wars and influence their progress and outcomes. The increasing technological capability of combatants and their access to information is the next big breakthrough in the study of civil war.

The fact that the new ICT environment will affect so many aspects of civil wars means that all combatants in every civil war will feel its effects. Citizens and rebel leaders in non-Muslim civil wars – such as those currently taking place in the DRC, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, South Sudan and the CAR - are certainly strategizing about how best to navigate these new technologies. What is

[31] Source: Walter & Philips dataset.
[32] The same argument may apply to the rise of pro-government militias. See Carey & Mitchell in this volume for a detailed discussion of these factions.

different about Muslim-majority countries – and the reason these trends are first observed there - is that these countries were best positioned to take advantage of a web 2.0 world. The global Sunni population is enormous, creating a ready-made base of support that the internet and social media could suddenly reach. In addition, the Sunni population in oil-poor countries such as Syria, Somalia, Chad and Mali could use ICT to directly link to the oil-rich Sunni populations of the Persian Gulf. This large transnational kinship group was perfectly situated to be tapped by web-savvy political entrepreneurs.

This does not mean that other groups in other regions of the world will not learn how to exploit the advantages of ICT. My guess is that any group with a large number of international kin, especially wealthy kin, will pursue similar strategies. Sunnis are leading the way because the benefits of a web 2.0 world have been easiest for them to tap.

Conclusion

The world is experiencing a new wave of civil wars unlike ones we have seen in the past. This wave is characterized by the rise of rebel groups pursuing extreme ideologies, a rise in the number of transnational actors involved in these wars, and the use of goals and strategies directed at global rather than local audiences. These trends are a precursor to a series of changes we are likely to see in civil war players adapt to a new and evolving ICT environment.

The field of civil war has not yet theorized about the ways in which this new technology is likely to revolutionize civil war. This article identified some of the ways in which combatants are likely to adapt their strategies to exploit this new information environment, but much more work needs to be done. The fact that the Web 2.0 has radically changed the quantity and quality of information available to individuals, groups and governments (and the way they transmit it) means that much of what we know about civil war dynamics will also change. This transformation is currently manifesting itself in the rise of global Jihadi groups in the Muslim world. But it will be exploited by other groups as well.

Not surprisingly, it was in the countries that were some of the most restrictive in terms of information and free speech where new information and communication technology first had its largest effect. Globally-oriented groups such as al Qa'ida and ISIS formed and prospered in countries that had previously been some of the most information-poor countries of the world (in addition to some of the poorest and most authoritarian). It was in these countries where the new-found flow of information allowed for an opening – an opening for individuals to organize, for rebel groups to link to other groups, and for human capital and war financing to begin to flow.

Combatants in Muslim countries were also quick to figure out how to exploit ICT to their advantage. They discovered that framing their movement along a worldwide divide that is large (Sunni), wealthy (oil-rich) and ideologically extreme (Salafi-Jihadist) allowed them to utilize the web in ways that bring in more money and recruits than had previously been possible. In fact, the trans-border nature of both the Sunni population and Persian Gulf financing was tailor made for the internet age. It was a group with a large international audience and wealthy outside donors that most easily exploited these new technologies.

Moving forward, our challenge as scholars will be to figure out the full range of implications that emerging technologies will have on every aspect of civil war. It is also to theorize about who is most likely to utilize this technology, when they are likely to do so, and the conditions under which these new strategies are more or less likely to succeed. I've outlined some implications and theorized about why we are observing these "new new" civil wars in predominantly Muslim countries. But much more work needs to be done. We don't know exactly how this third wave of civil wars will evolve and which additional groups and countries will best exploit these advances. We also don't know which strategies will turn out to be the most successful and how these strategies are likely to change over time. What we do know is that the internet will play a bigger, not smaller role, in every decision that is made. Our job is to figure out how and why it is so important.