# The West on Irreversible Path to Civil War

Davis Betz is a Professor of War in the Modern World at King's College London. Prof. Betz discusses why the West is displaying all the warning signs of a pending civil war, which has now gone so far that it cannot be reversed. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: https://glenndiesen.substack.com/ X /Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: https://gofund.me/09ea012f Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL

## #Glenn

Welcome back to the program. We're joined today by Professor David Betz from King's College London to discuss the possibility of Western countries moving toward a civil war. Thank you very much for taking the time.

## #David Betz

I'm very pleased to be here.

## #Glenn

Well, my first thought, when I went over this topic, was that it must be a very difficult or awkward research focus for an academic, because whenever one addresses issues of societal divisions—be it between elites and the public, between ethnic or religious groups, or between competing political identities—it creates tensions, since it questions the entire liberal project that's been essentially remaking our societies over the past decade. So I can imagine it creates some frustration.

I mean, in Europe we often have this obsession with speech acts, as you know—the assumption being that you create new social realities with words, by, for example, normalizing something. So one can create them by talking about civil war, the expectation of violence, maybe even incentivizing people to prepare for conflict. And so it's an interesting dilemma. I was wondering if this has been an issue for you—that is, on one hand, arguing that this is a problem that should be addressed, but at the same time being told that if you talk about it, you might actually cause the very problems you want to avoid. Has that been an issue for you?

## #David Betz

Yes, it has. That's a very common problem. I'd say it's actually the most typical reaction to the thesis I've presented, for exactly the reasons you mentioned. There's a very firm belief embedded in the

Western consciousness—I would suggest, certainly in the European consciousness—about the idea of the power of speech to bring things into being. It's an idea that's been around for a long time, but it's achieved almost complete dominance within academia and policy circles, certainly in government. Governments behave very much as though they believe this, which is no doubt why they're so concerned to crack down on things.

The irony is, they ought to know—because Western society used to know—that the way to deal with ideas, the way to defeat ideas if you thought one needed defeating, was through argument, through presenting a better idea. But they've given up on that, probably because they don't have better ideas. They're at the end of the rope—argumentatively, economically, strategically, and in many other ways. I can't help but notice, now that I'm looking at your bookshelf over your shoulder, there are two books I can see very clearly: one titled *Europe* and the other *Hubris*. And that just seems like a very fitting visual setup for this conversation.

## #Glenn

Yes, written by Professor Jonathan Haslam, a British professor. Well, again, when you approach this topic, it's from an academic perspective. There's a lot of literature about countries drifting toward internal conflict and civil war. I used to teach at the Department of Policing, Intelligence, and Counterterrorism, but all our case studies on civil war were far away from the West. The assumption was that civil war was something for the history books—for the Europeans. So, how do you see this when you look at the indicators? What are you looking at when you see the possibility of civil war returning to Europe? I should also add that this is a concern often raised not just by political but also by military leaders—especially in France, and to a lesser extent in the UK. So, what is it that makes you believe Europe could be moving in this direction, as well as North America?

## #David Betz

Yeah, there's a lot to unpack there. Firstly, I'd just say, with respect to the literature—the academic literature on civil wars—it's far from exclusive, or far from excluding the West from this picture when you dig down into the details. I mean, most scholars in this area certainly recognize that there's nothing—there's nothing, you know, genetic—that makes the West immune to civil conflict. So, in terms of the controversial nature of what I've suggested with respect to the literature, it's not particularly controversial.

There's a certain prejudice, I think—a rather lazy habit of assuming that these things are real problems only for people in hot, dusty places abroad, but not in the rich, white parts of the world. The "garden," as the former head of the EU External Action Service, Josep Borrell, once described Europe—as opposed to the "jungle," where nothing worked and civil wars were a problem. Anyway, that's just prejudice, frankly. With respect to the factors, there are three that I think are most indicative and reflect a kind of consensus drawn from the existing literature on the causes of civil wars.

The first one is factionalism. A factionalized society is one that's clearly prone to civil conflict. We now have, throughout the Western world, highly factionalized societies. This is not, again, a much-disputed issue. I would add, however, that the form of factionalization we're now experiencing across the Western world—I'll speak specifically about the UK, though one could mention other countries as well—is not just factionalism, but a particular form of it that's extremely toxic, known as polar factionalism.

Polar factionalism refers to a situation where people are no longer just disagreeing with each other over matters of the day—you know, things like abortion or the death penalty—where reasonable people can have very strong views but still feel themselves to be compatriots with those who hold opposing opinions. Polar factionalism is when people suppress their individual feelings about this or that policy in favor of what they think is the consensus view of their faction or tribe. Right. And this is a situation that really only occurs when people are afraid for their security.

When you feel insecure, you look around for support from your allies. You naturally feel a need to have friends and allies around you, and people tend to respond to that feeling by adopting what they think is the consensus view of their tribe. This has a self-reinforcing dimension, as many things do, in terms of the factors I'll mention. Once they take off as an idea, they tend to aggravate the underlying factional situation as people become increasingly factionalized, increasingly tribalized. You get this acceleration of the gaps between groups and a heightening of the tensions between them—to use a bit of Marxist terminology. The second major factor is referred to in the civil wars literature, in a rather anodyne manner, as "downgrading."

Downgrading is a situation where a dominant but declining majority faction within society—normally an ethnically defined faction—feels it is facing a permanent loss of status. In this case, they fear, for example, the loss of the primacy of their language as the lingua franca of society, the loss of their cultural traditions, ideals, and their religious and cultural symbols—the things that are glorified and treasured in that society. These are being replaced, and sometimes even actively destroyed, as part of a deliberate effort to drive further division. So they fear they're losing their dominant status throughout that society in all kinds of ways—cultural, economic, legal, social, and so on.

The term for this, in more common use, is "replacement," or, to use the term of the French philosopher Renaud Camus, "the Great Replacement." Until relatively recently, that was a phrase which, if used in an academic context, would have raised a lot of eyebrows and led people to think that whoever used it was a rather suspicious character. And it is still, one must admit, regarded in academic circles as a bit of extremist thinking. The fact of the matter, though, is that in the UK, as of April 2023, according to one poll, just over 30% of the population believe that such a thing is, in fact, occurring.

So "downgrading" is the anodyne, social-science or literature term for the phenomenon that people usually talk about as "replacement." And that replacement idea has taken quite a strong hold in the

collective psyche of many Western countries—including Britain, and really, I think, throughout the Western world. And there's very good reason for this. It's perfectly obvious, and easily measurable statistically, that there's been a radical demographic transformation of these societies through migration, which has been carried out as an elite-driven project, largely in defiance of public will—often through deceit, in the sense that no political parties, certainly not in the UK context, have ever run on a platform of mass migration.

They all promise low levels of migration, occurring in a highly managed manner, in line with the economic needs of a highly advanced, highly industrial society that draws on the world's top talent. But instead, what we've been getting from both major parties for almost the last 30 years are levels of net migration that are predominantly—massively predominantly, in fact—low-skilled migration, which is economically retrograde in per capita terms. So people feel they are being downgraded or replaced, and there's good reason for them to feel that way. And that is simply a very powerful driver toward civil war, because people react to this. That's a fairly well-understood idea in the literature.

The third thing follows from the two preceding points, which is the loss of faith in the functioning of normal politics as a viable way of addressing collective action problems. Another way of putting this is to talk about a crisis of legitimacy. When you say that a given state has lost its legitimacy, that's a reflection on the overall political system. It's generally not a party-political statement; it's about the perception of the system's ability to solve collective action problems in a way people accept as just and fair. Again, the data is very clear that the perception of legitimacy throughout the Western world is in very serious crisis. One can measure this in a couple of obvious ways.

One way is to look at people's political attitudes. The way they express their primary political attitudes is very telling in this respect, because the most commonly expressed political view across almost the entire Western world today is not really left or right in terms of policy orientation. It's agreement with the idea that voting doesn't matter—voting doesn't matter. And if "voting doesn't matter" is the dominant political idea in your system, it's hard to describe that system as one imbued with high levels of perceived legitimacy. No one is going to agree with that statement if they think the system is—well, and then, in a related sense, when people talk about the "uniparty," for example, that's also what they're referring to.

They're referring to this idea that it doesn't really matter who you vote for, because ultimately whoever gets into power will simply enact ideas that are generally palatable to the elite. And in cases where elite attitudes diverge from those of the street, of mass attitudes—and it's almost invariably the case—elite opinions prevail. There's a very important, and I think very telling, piece of research that was done on the American political scene on this issue. It looked at many hundreds of examples of policy areas where elite opinion differed from that of mass opinion and asked simply: what was the political result—essentially, who won out?

And the finding was essentially that almost 100% of the time, elite beat street. Once that happens for a few decades, people eventually cotton on to the fact that what they think is supposed to be a representative, electoral, democratic system—one that operates by aggregating political preferences on an individual level throughout society, coming to a determination of what most people want, and then putting that into action—is, in fact, not the way the system works. Once they understand that, the perception of legitimacy drains away. A related way of understanding what I think is probably the same problem, or may in fact be the real underlying problem, is through measurements of trust.

Trust is a supremely important idea in sociology. It's one of the most consistently studied and measured aspects of society. And there's simply no argument on the point that, throughout the Western world, trust has been in long-term decline over decades—going back, in fact, to the 1970s, perhaps even earlier. One could debate why trust is collapsing, but there's not much debate over the fact that it has declined very, very much. You can see this in poll results, for example, showing that the number of people who express trust in politicians—to be truthful, to act responsibly on behalf of the nation, all that sort of thing—is very, very low.

We're talking about figures somewhere around 10%, sometimes less. But other institutions are also facing a serious decline in trust—whether that's the legal system or journalism. Journalism is also very low on the list. A recent development is that even the professions or institutions which in the past maintained fairly high levels of institutional trust—like the police, the clergy, and medicine—are now very much in decline. The police one is, I think, in the context of the current discussion, very, very important.

So when ordinary, mainstream people express high levels of distrust in the police and the judiciary, that's also important—very indicative of a, uh, ill society, one that's impregnated with, um, the potential for conflict. So it would be these three factors—if I were to summarize—I'd say, in terms of the scholarly understanding, the indicative features or common indicators of civil war are often pointed to. And in the current Western context, all of these are flashing red. This isn't amber; it's not, you know, gentle warning signs. These are very deep red signals that things have gone wrong.

## #Glenn

Well, whenever a civil war is discussed, it's often assumed that it starts with some deception or manipulation of reality—disinformation or deliberate undermining of trust. But at some point, sometimes, the lack of trust is simply because political leadership is not trustworthy anymore. Again, trust is good for society, but the misplacement of trust can be quite costly. So the idea that everyone should blindly trust is not the solution either. It does appear, though, that much of the frustration these days is organized around rhetoric toward, well, for example, referencing the "globalists," which suggests these very anti-nationalist political elites embracing multiculturalism instead of a unifying culture—radical secularism that is not just decoupling religion from government, but from society itself, more specifically Christianity.

It often looks like there are more efforts to reduce the role of Christianity in society. And with all of this, it does seem like a lot of it has been almost structural for a while. Samuel Huntington wrote this really excellent article back in 2004—so it's been more than 20 years now—called *The Dead Souls*, in which he pointed out how our societies were dividing. Of course, he was focusing on American society, but this is very similar here in Europe. He made the point that, for the average citizen, what was most important was to preserve the current language, culture, religion, and national identity, with an acceptable pattern of change over time.

But then he said that for many of the political elites—what we'd now call globalists—the only thing they seemed to care about was strengthening the global economy or supporting international institutions. And overall, he said the main split in the future would be between, yeah, the nationalists and the cosmopolitans. Of course, one can use different words for this, but it's a real division that's been growing for quite some time. But it does beg the question: if a civil war were to break out, who's fighting whom? What would this actually look like? What's the chain reaction? Would it be between different ethnic or religious groups, between political groups? Would it be between the political elites—the globalists, if you will—and the public? How do you see a likely scenario of a civil war breaking out somewhere in the West?

## #David Betz

Well, after a period of factionalization—which we're already in, as I've suggested—there will emerge essentially three primary groups. I don't wish to… I'm not trying to suggest a degree of—well, I think there's still—these are not yet completely formed, but they're getting rather close, and it's accelerating very quickly. There are three primary groups. The first we've already mentioned. You've described them as the globalists, the elite—we're talking about the elite, with attitudes that are post-nationalist, cosmopolitan, or globalist, as you've said.

The irony there, of course, is that these are national elites who hold national leadership positions but have almost no national feeling. They're not interested in national interest; they don't think in those terms. In fact, they find the idea of national interest to be quite morally suspicious—that people who talk about it are rather suspect characters—and the use of such language, to these elites, betrays some kind of almost atavistic character, which they find deplorable. You mentioned Christianity. I think that's almost certainly another factor. It's probably also true that it's a post-Christian outlook.

The elite is also post-Christian, so that's one faction. The other faction is the non-native community— or rather, communities—the most important being the new Muslim populations, which have proved to be essentially unassimilable. They're too ambitious, too large, too cohesive in their own right to wish to assimilate. Also, it must be said that there's little in the current Western cultural and social landscape that's appealing to them as something to assimilate into. Uh, and I think lots of non-Muslims could actually recognize much in that attitude. It's a fair assessment.

But the point is that it is unassimilable, which is, of course, what drives the idea of replacement, which I've already referred to. So you have the elite, you have the non-native—fairly recent arrivals, although "recent" is a fairly flexible concept; we're really talking about a period of thirty years in most cases—and then you have the mass, the native population, that declining majority. How is this going to play out? Well, if you understand these three basic potential belligerents, then you can see that it's likely to metastasize into a conflict in which the central actor is the native mass—what's sometimes referred to as the "somewhere" class.

These are people who are rooted in a place who, despite the now many decades-long, elite-driven policies of deracination—of formerly national cultures—still feel themselves to be rooted in a place, to feel themselves connected to their land, their history, their language, and so on. So the first vector is between the mass and the elite, and that will take the form essentially of a peasant revolt. I don't use the term "peasant" in this case disparagingly; it's the appropriate term to describe a revolt that is essentially conservative in its character, one that seeks to punish the elite for having changed the rules of the game in some way that is invidious to the majority of the population—to the mass—in a way that, to use the now almost clichéd term, comes across as a violation of the social contract.

So when people talk about being betrayed by their elite, that's the attitude they're expressing. I think that in the 21st century, in the Western European context, that peasant revolt is probably going to take the form of something that looks like a Latin American–style dirty war. "Dirty war" is a concept that emerged in the literature from the study of Latin American chronic, low-grade civil wars. But it can, and has, been applied to situations like Italy in the 1970s and '80s and its Years of Lead, for example, the Northern Ireland conflict, and the like. What this is, is a form of civil war typified by its chronic quality—by essentially low levels of ongoing violence.

And that violence typically takes the form of things like assassinations, kidnappings, punishment beatings, harassment campaigns, and the like—normally directed essentially at elites. So, you know, a classic example that many people will recognize: think of the Red Brigades in Germany kidnapping and holding hostage German industrialists, for example. So you'll have that sort of activity, which is essentially designed, in strategic terms, to punish the elite—not necessarily to replace it, but to force it to perform its elite function in a way that's recognizable to the mass as serving the national interest again.

The second vector is inter-tribal or inter-ethnic. And that, again, in the 21st-century Western European context, is likely to take, in my view, a form that's chiefly characterized by a rural-versus-urban dimension. You'll have the emergence of very obvious ethnic enclaves, which will become increasingly concentrated into a larger mass that will then be laid siege to—not through, you know, conventional military means, but through paramilitary action focused primarily on the life-support systems of cities, on infrastructure, essentially.

The most obvious and classic form of infrastructural attack in a siege context is on the food distribution system. But in the 21st-century context, we're talking about a very wide range of inputs that cities require to keep themselves functioning at all. Those would include primarily electrical power, gas, and transportation networks—particularly the transportation network for food logistics. These are all easily targetable in the contemporary urban condition. It's a very obvious aspect of how our societies have naturally configured themselves: cities are dependent on infrastructure that's external to them and has to be transmitted in.

It's very difficult to guard this stuff. It's very dispersed. It's often actually rather fragile, despite being quite big. And we're not really in the habit of thinking about it, of defending it, because in a normally functioning society, no one would ever attack it. You know, you don't—it would—it's—but that puts a lot of weight on those two words: "normally functioning." An abnormally functioning society, in which there is a perfectly sound strategic logic to attacking this stuff, makes it relatively easy to do with small numbers of people and limited resources. The impact, moreover, of switching off the power to an urban area in the contemporary world can be very, very serious, right?

And we can—we know this, for example, from our historical knowledge of severe blackouts that occurred essentially for accidental or natural reasons in the past. I'm thinking of the American blackouts of the 1970s, which in several cases resulted in outbreaks of mass looting and a general loss of civil control in urban areas. But also of more recent instances, like the 2011 London riots, which weren't caused by the loss of infrastructure but were indicative of how easily cities can explode into chaotic scenes of rioting and violence, and of how difficult it is for the police to manage that and regain control.

In the case of the 2011 riots, it took a week for the police to get control of the situation. On any given day, there were probably around two or three thousand people involved in rioting in a city of ten million. And of those two or three thousand, maybe two or three hundred were seriously violent. Even that took a week to contain. So imagine a situation where something like the 2011 London riots is happening in every major city every two weeks, at a scale ten times larger. And then consider that, in the case of the UK, the ability of the police—in terms of their numbers, training, and so on—to control these situations is actually diminished in 2025 compared to 2011.

## #Glenn

Let me ask a last question, because I—well, I remember Eric Hobsbawm. He wrote back in the early 1990s that the whole nation-building process that had homogenized the population—what made peasants into Frenchmen and migrants into Americans—had begun to reverse. And that was thirty-five years ago. What you see now in the US, of course, are all these polls showing expectations of political violence growing almost year by year. You mentioned that this is getting worse, that it's accelerating. This isn't some minor sign of things to be concerned about—the red flags should have been up for a long time. But can any of this be reversed, or have we crossed a point of no return? In other words, do you think a civil war could actually happen at this point?

# #David Betz

Yes, that's what I think. I don't think it can be reversed—if by "reversed" you mean completely avoided. That possibility has passed. If you could invent a time machine and go back to 2000—in the UK context, maybe 2011 or 2012, before the Boris wave of migration brought in ten million new people—that would have been wise. There's a very important scholar, Paul Collier, who wrote a book published in 2012, which is why I used that year, called *Exodus*. It was a study of the effects of mass migration on sending and receiving countries—a very measured, very thoughtful book in which he concluded, quite simply, that mass migration was a bad idea.

He said it's harmful to the sending societies and also to the receiving societies. The way he understood its harm in the receiving society was primarily through its impact on social capital. And here he was picking up on what I was talking about earlier—things like trust and legitimacy. These are related ideas. So he was talking essentially about its impact on social capital, and he was drawing heavily on the work of the famous American sociologist Robert Putnam, the kind of granddaddy of sociology, who also wrote very critically about the corrosive impact of diversity on social capital.

And Collier's point was—again, I don't think I'm simplifying, or at least not unfairly—that economic capital is preceded by social capital. He makes the point that if you want to have a wealthy society, the most important thing isn't oil or diamonds or gold or any of those things. They're helpful, sure, but the most important thing is high levels of trust. We can find plenty of societies with lots of gold, oil, and diamonds that are not wealthy. The key factor is the high level of trust, or social capital.

So, to the extent that mass migration, multiculturalism, official diversity policies, and the triumph of identity politics all have the same effect on social capital that hydrochloric acid has on organic substances, you can see this is something that ought not to have happened—but it did. And the consequences of that are now simply baked in. What perhaps can be done is to mitigate some of the effects of what is likely to occur. That's what I personally urge governments to do—particularly the security services, but also across a range of ministries—to consider what is likely to happen in the context of civil conflict and prepare to mitigate some of those effects.

The most important thing, though, in terms of mitigation, is to reduce the duration. The longer it goes on, the more damage will be done. So, in short, in answer to your question, I don't think it can be avoided. And the best thing, if it cannot be avoided, is to make it absolutely as short as possible. If I were to make an analogy, I'd say it's like having an abscessed tooth that has to be removed—you wouldn't want it pulled slowly over a 12-hour period. You'd want a quick, sharp extraction. And that, I think, is our situation now. The political off-ramps have already been missed. The consequences have essentially already arrived. The situation is going to accelerate. People should brace themselves, because it's going to be a wild ride.

# #Glenn

Yeah, it is interesting. You mentioned Robert Putnam, because he wrote *Bowling Alone*, which should be taught in every sociology class. I think he went against his instincts, because apparently he's a bit of a liberal, but he also made this recognition that more homogeneous groups or societies tend to have more trust. And, you know, you can even do case studies. For example, if you look at desertions in wars—if you have a military unit where people come from the same village and are about the same age—there will be fewer desertions simply because they've built a stronger bond. And this goes a little bit to human nature.

That is, we reproduce the group, which means we're more likely to form these bonds of trust. And again, I think that's a conclusion in *Bowling Alone* as well. It's a counterargument to the whole "strength in diversity" idea. The more diverse a society is, the less social capital there tends to be—less generosity, less trust. He also pointed out there's less democracy: people are less likely to vote, to know their neighbor, to trust their neighbor. So it is quite fascinating. But as we began to say, it's often an argument that's very difficult to make, because I feel like we've formed these ideologies in our societies where there are certain truths you shouldn't challenge, and a lot of the liberal policies, such as migration, shouldn't be challenged.

## #David Betz

It's a piece of dogma, and it's empty—completely empty—and the evidence on this is absolutely conclusive. As you mentioned, Putnam himself is the perfect example of this. It wasn't *Bowling Alone* that he felt the need to abjure; it was a later piece of research he did, which was published as a lengthy article in a Scandinavian journal, if I recall correctly, specifically on the impact of diversity. He later felt the need to publicly distance himself from his own research.

But I think the way he did that was very interesting, because he basically said, "Ultimately, the things I've found are very alarming. But over time, these are short-term effects that will become less and less of a problem." So, you know, maybe in the short term you get this loss of social capital, but it will come back over time. The problem is, in the time between when he claimed that—twenty years ago—and now, we've actually seen the opposite to be the case. Second- and third-generation migrants express higher rates of alienation and outright enmity toward their nominal new homelands than the first generation.

So it's going the opposite of his expressed hopes. Anyway, the research is very, very clear on this. But to state it, as you say, is controversial in the way it is when you go against any—um—dogma, whether it's religious dogma or, uh, any other sort of dogma. Although in this case, it does have a kind of, almost, quasi-religious quality to it, in the sense that people's reactions when you question it have something of the character of people reacting to sacrilege.

## #Glenn

Yeah. No, it's not met with rational counterarguments. Yeah. Well, the study on Scandinavia—since I reside in Scandinavia—the argument there was that it's known for these high-welfare states, but that this was dependent to a large extent on being very homogeneous societies. That is, as society becomes more diverse, everyone more or less starts to live in an airport. We all happen to live in the same place with random people, with less and less in common, and people then become less willing to hand over more of their hard-earned money to those who aren't considered part of their in-group, if you will. Anyway, thank you so much. It's a bit of a depressing topic, but it's a very important one to discuss. So if people disagree, at least it should be countered by rational arguments, not this dogma—as you said, well, pre-test dogma. So thank you very much.

## #David Betz

Thank you, Glenn Diesen. Pleasure to meet you.