

What Open Conflict In The US Might Look Like

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Democracy [is a kind of civil war](#). Every two to four, or even six to eight years, different factions within a nation grapple for control of its mechanisms of power. Instead of bombs and bullets, the vector for this change in leadership comes from people's hearts and minds. Depending on whether one has positive or negative view of democracy, that particular system either results in a peaceful leadership change without casualties, or one might say that it is a negative aspect of democracy that we're forced to engage in such conflict at all.

For a time, this civil war has only consisted of votes and slogans, but now that tensions are growing in the West, we are beginning to see the first casualties: five police officers died in Dallas two weeks ago, while three more have been killed in Baton Rouge. The violence carried out mirrors the same inciting incidents of many revolutionaries and civil wars. It only takes a few fighters and a few casualties to spark the conflict itself.

[We have felt the rumblings for a while now](#), but it is now widely felt that we are coming to a head in this particularly polarized election season. So what will happen in the coming weeks and months? And [what will happen on the 9th of November?](#)

We might just be passing the apex and quickly reaching terminal velocity. While it might have been unheard of years ago to suggest that open conflict will once again rage in the United States, the idea is now becoming more believable.

But this potential open conflict [will be nothing like the American Civil War](#). Most civil wars, rebellions, and wars of independence have, at least for us in the West, consisted of second generation warfare. We really have not seen such a war without muskets, cannons, and cavalry. We have not seen an internal struggle with unmanned drones and Abrams tanks, and certainly not with social media coordinating operatives.

In the past, separation through conflict was primarily about territory. The thinking went: because we cannot rule our own lives under your regime, we wish to separate, have our own land, and establish our own regime that better reflects our values. This works when drawing lines on a map. It doesn't work if there are no lines. [The different factions in America today have no set territory to call their own, retreat to, or even fight over](#).

There was once a division between North and South before and during the Civil War, and even at the time perceptions in the North and South were not homogeneous. You had southern abolitionists and northern separatists. However, by and large, there was Northern sentiment and Southern sentiment, thus allowing for a clear territorial line between the two opposing peoples, cultures, lands and laws. It was because of that boundary that people could congregate together in their own distinctive space.

Today, we have no such clear divisions. Texas may be a conservative state, but Austin has the reputation of a liberal city. In Virginia, the Appalachians are voting for Trump, while DC commuters are voting for Hillary. California is a Democrat stronghold, except for the Republican northern neck. The Midwest is generally conservative, but Minnesota is decidedly socialist. The west consisting of Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico is strongly anti-establishment irrespective of liberal or conservative sway, but the Mormons of Utah buck that trend by being more pro-establishment than any other western state. Where could you draw the line between one ideological nation and another when, throughout every region, there is a patchwork of conservative and liberal enclaves? The answer is, you can't.

The Civil War had the Mason Dixon Line, driving a hard wedge between North and South. Even with this separation, the war was the bloodiest conflict in American history. During the battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, the southerners in New Orleans didn't have to worry that General Burnside would place their city under siege, as he was hundreds of miles away. During the battle of Shiloh, Atlanta didn't have to worry about Grant's impending army, as he, too, was months away.

With traditional armies, moving across hundreds of miles, conflicts took time to establish, and they were usually fought by official combatants. You might not see conflict at all in your small southern town, and you didn't necessarily have to worry about the Union forces in Kentucky when you're living in South Carolina and vice versa. Eventually, every area had its own particular conflict, but it never occurred all at once.

The same cannot be said if a similar conflict were to take place today. If tensions finally boil over, every state, and even every city, could see a hotbed of violence simultaneously.

Imagine ground zero being [somewhere like Orlando](#), caused by racial violence, or ideological violence, or whatever fault line is dominant at the time. Sympathizers in Los Angeles could see the event on mass media television and realize now is the time to strike. Their reprisal would then spark further [violence in Chicago](#), which might galvanize Detroit, which might mobilize D.C., and then Baltimore. The herd mentality takes over and every city becomes a battle ground, a battle ground not fought over by standing armies, but by insurgents against their targets – civilian, military, or otherwise.

There are no rebel fighters, no loyalist armies, no Union generals. There are no rules to this unchecked warfare, which means no official treaty or surrender when one side is battered enough. With conflict happening everywhere all at once, there is no defense force to hide behind and no way for them to organize a frontline. "They," whoever they are, don't need to hold strategic points of interest or plant their flag on a hill. They can instead organize quickly through social media, then melt back into the populace, waiting to strike again. The battle could be suddenly right outside your door, no matter where you live.

One might not even call this conflict “war” in the traditional sense, because war, at least as it is conceptualized, has some order and organization to it. There are rules to war, mechanics of war, an ebb and flow as battlegrounds cross the land. But this war, whatever it is, has no rules.

This is, of course, the worst case scenario, though the idea might not be the most realistic, admittedly.

However, no can know for sure, as the nature of war itself has changed. Standing armies are a thing of the past in the age of 4th generation warfare, where guerrilla tactics, subversion, and spec ops are the rule, rather than the exception. It is unknown how exactly an open conflict in the United States will take place in this new paradigm, but I would prefer not to find out firsthand.