

How to prepare for a potential civil war

America is more polarized than ever. According to a recent poll 34% of Americans believe civil war is “likely” and 13% believe it is “very likely.” Luxury bunker sales are up with customers citing concerns of “civil unrest”. (DiMella, 2024) Could we be headed toward civil war? If so, how can we prepare for it?

When Societies Fracture

From studying and interviewing survivors of civil war, coups and unrest from different countries, all shared one thing in common. When societies fracture, they do so along political, geopolitical, religious, ethnic, tribal, racial or economic lines. People group up along these lines and those who are not in control (usually, but not always the minority), suffer terribly at the hands of those in control (usually, but not always the majority.) People group up and most of them avoid going outside. If you are in an area controlled by the opposing group, I strongly suggest getting to someplace that is controlled by your people before the checkpoints go up.

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Those who fail to get to an area controlled by their people before checkpoints go up typically suffer. Their options for survival are often not good. If they want to survive, they often have to find someone who is not an enemy of those in power who is willing to hide them, or E&E to friendly lines, and the latter is extremely difficult to do in occupied

cities. Those who do get out usually do so on foot, through rough terrain, with only what they can carry.

Ivory Coast

Some good friends of ours emigrated from Ivory Coast. Both of them came from well-to-do land owning, families that own farming and livestock concerns. Ivory Coast has experienced two civil wars, the first began in 2002 as the result of a military rebellion and ended in 2007. The second Ivorian Civil War began in 2010, ended in 2011 and was fought over election results. Thousand died in each war. 750K civilians were displaced by the fighting. (Wikipedia, 2024)

The husband told me that during the war, around 30 people took shelter in his home. That is a lot of mouths feed! Imagine cramming 30 people in your home.

The wife told me that she “got fat” because she was unable to go outside. Her home was also packed with people, but they had plenty of food because they own a mango large plantation that grows tons of fruits and vegetables all year round and her father ranches hundreds of head of cattle, as well as goats, sheep, chickens, and has other livestock.

The farmers had to be protected, or the people would starve, so they did what they could to help others. Unfortunately, very few American families own farms anymore, even hobby farms.

Civil War I vs Civil War II

Our last civil war killed 2.5 percent of the population of our nation or around 750,000 people. If the same percentage of people die in our next civil war, 7 million Americans will lose our lives. (Staff, 2016) That would be like losing the entire state of Arizona. However, it is possible that many

more could die due to urbanization, globalization, the number of weapons in the hands of the people, the efficacy of modern weapons, and the next level zeal with which the hardcore radical left hates conservatives.

During my lifetime, we have gone from being able to sit down at the same table and share meal to liberals disowning family members they suspect might be conservative, openly calling for the death of conservative politicians, chanting “Death to America” (by Americans, in America!), and now the assassination attempt on former President Trump. (Sarah Rahal, 2024) It could be argued that the first shots have already been fired because the assassination attempt was clearly inspired by the incendiary rhetoric of extremists within the political left.

On some level, these events and this behavior are just incomprehensible to me because it's so far outside the accepted norms of polite society. On another level, it's not surprising at all to students of history, nature, and survival. We see it over and over. Cruelty, violence, and hatred resulting from incendiary rhetoric and propaganda. It must not be so hard to use these tools to get a certain type of people whipped up into a frenzy because it happens over and over.

How Does One Prepare for a Civil War?

We cannot know, of course, with any certainty, if or when Civil War II will happen. Mankind has a dismal track record when it comes to attempting to predict the future. Therefore, I'll leave that to the realm of soothsayers, crystal balls, economics and other pseudoscience.

Sometimes Survival is About What You *Don't* Do

So, how do we prepare if we can't predict the future? The answer is to attain a state of general readiness and antifragility. Get ready for volatility and disruption by figuring out where you are fragile, work to become more resilient in those areas, and then don't do anything stupid. It's good to do the work and get prepared, but survival isn't only about what you do. It's also what you don't do.

In a civil war, some of us will have to decide whether to join up and fight for our side. Volunteering to go fight in a war may not increase your chances of survival, but sometimes the greater good trumps individual safety.

Another decision we may have to make is whether to shelter in place or bugout. One will improve your chances of survival and the other will diminish it.

Be Ready to Shelter in Place or Bug Out as the Situation Demands

The two main survival strategies are the same for a Civil War as they are for nearly everything else. Either you shelter in place or you bugout. Either one could be the only way to survive a particular threat, so the survivalist must be prepared to do both!

How do you know which to do? When society fractures, you will find yourself in the majority or the minority. Either way, you need to get to someplace your people are in control of. We can't know precisely what we will be facing until it happens, but we know the general lines upon which societies break up and realign themselves, which I identified at the beginning of the article.

You may be able to see it coming or you may be living someplace where you are already a minority on virtually all counts. You are already in the political, economic, racial, ethnic, and religious minority. Or you live someplace and it's just obvious that the place will go sideways the moment the SHTF. If any of these are the case, I suggest relocating now. However difficult it is for you to move now; it will probably be easier than moving post-SHTF.

25 years ago, I lived in Arizona in the Phoenix-Metro area. There was no place for the populace of the Valley of the Sun to evacuate to because there was no place with the infrastructure to support millions of people that could be reached on one tank of gas. Emergency planners understood this, so they didn't bother working on an evacuation plan. There simply wasn't one and there may never be one.

Phoenix is low on water and has way more people than it can support. It's basically an island surrounded by desert. Trying to get out would be like a scene from Mad Max. Staying could be worse. Either way, people would have to compete with each other for water and food in the Mecca of competitive shooting. It would be a bloodbath.

Understanding how easily things could all fall apart, I moved to a smaller community in dairy country in the Intermountain West that should be more stable and self-sufficient. Here, I am no longer in the political or religious minority. It should be more somewhat more stable in volatile times as the valley exports food, there is plenty of water (an anomaly in the West, water flows into Cache Valley from three sides), we are not downwind of any nuclear targets or reactors, and my family is part of the institution. In short, I relocated to a good homesteading location in the hope that it is less likely that I will have to bugout, but I have plans for that just in case.

Bugout

Many civilians are displaced during civil war. Entire towns empty ahead of or during fighting. So, be ready to move.

Being prepared to bugout requires more than a bugout bag.

One of the most important factors in a bugout is to bugout before everyone else does. To achieve that obviously takes a certain amount of preparation, planning, and practice. It also requires having predefined triggers. "If such and such happens, then we pack the truck, grab our gear, and leave."

Another important factor is having someplace to go. "I'm grabbing my pack and my rifle and heading to the mountains." Is not a bugout plan. You need a specific destination, and during a war, you may not know which direction you will be able to flee, so you should have multiple bugout destinations and routes in all directions, like the Apache had. They resisted the US Army for over 90 years, which makes their guerrilla campaign a good case study, in my opinion.

As a destination, a lifeboat property or retreat is ideal, but that's not what most people do. That's what the wealthy do, but of the cases I have studied, I have found that most people cannot afford that. Instead, they go and stay with family or friends. Those who are unable to do this, often become displaced persons, refugees. If possible, this should be avoided.

You might be more welcome when you arrive at your family member's house if you show up towing a trailer full of food and medicine. It might also go more smoothly if the two of you had a mutual assistance agreement in place before the disruption.

Shelter in Place

I have read accounts of Ukrainians who left the relative safety of their homes to charge a cellphone, only to never return. The point of sheltering in place during a war is to not give anyone any reason to come into your home and hope that they do not. To do that you'll need to stockpile supplies so you can stay inside.



Caching

My Viking ancestors prepared for battle by hiding their wealth, burying their hacksilver in the ground. Today people assume they did this as a practical consideration so their enemy wouldn't capture their wealth if they battle didn't go their way. They could go dig it up afterwards if they escaped or were ransomed.

After studying their religious beliefs and treasure hoards buried in Gotland, I think there is more to it than that. I think they also buried it to take it with them to the next life. They did the same thing on their farms. The father would bury a hoard, but the son wouldn't dig it up, instead he buried his own, and this sometimes carried on for generations.

I agree that caching wealth and supplies in case of capture is a good idea.

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