

Wartime violence

Francisco Villamil

War, peace, and political violence

UC3M, Fall 2023



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Israel-Palestine: Gaza death toll passes 5,000 with no ceasefire in sight



Child casualties in Gaza “a growing stain on our collective conscience”

UNICEF is calling for an immediate ceasefire and for sustained and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance

24 October 2023



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Hamas claims 700 killed in Gaza over past day, as hospitals filled beyond capacity

Volunteers say they are forced to bury multiple bodies together as space runs out; WHO says 12 out of 35 hospitals out of action; Hamas death toll cannot be independently verified

By **AGENCIES** and **TOI STAFF**

24 October 2023, 9:49 pm | 0



Key question

- Why do civilians die in a war?

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 - across actors?
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- We can also ask the same about **battle violence**

What we have seen so far

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- Historical trends in conflicts and big global changes
 - What historical events explain long-term trends in war?
- Causes of individual conflicts
 - Why did e.g. the Second Congo War break out? What countries are at risk of conflict?

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- But just think about WWII for a second

Violence patterns during WWII



Battle of Normandy

Violence patterns during WWII



Pearl Harbor

Violence patterns during WWII



London Blitz

Violence patterns during WWII



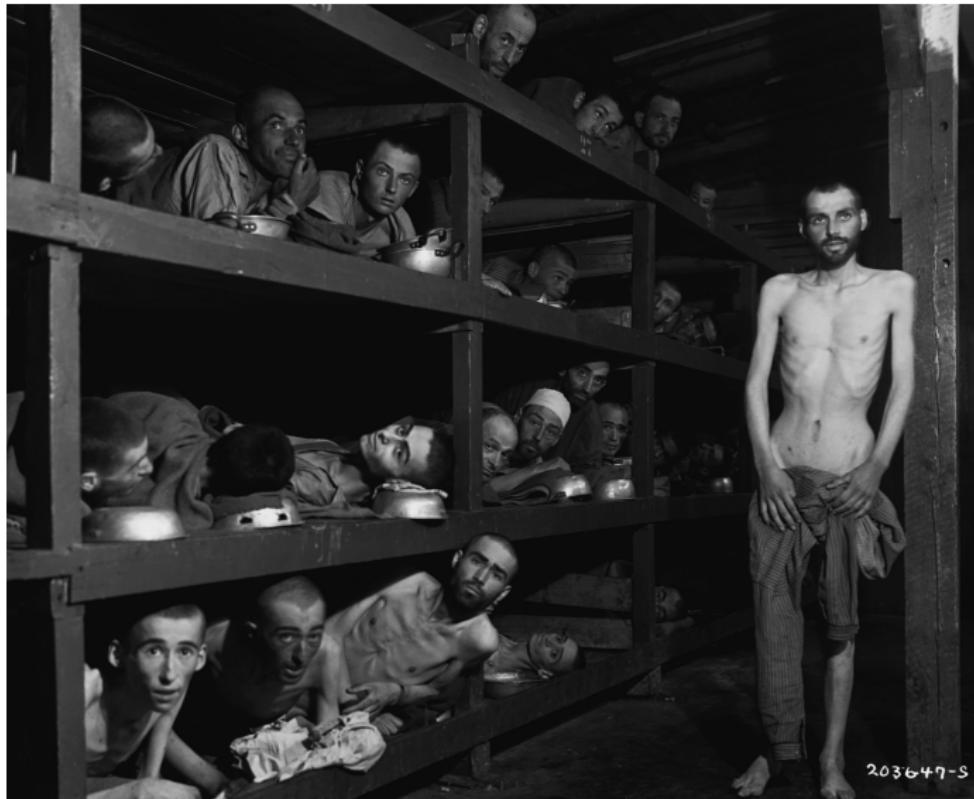
French Resistance

Violence patterns during WWII



Women accused of collaboration with the Nazis, Paris 1944

Violence patterns during WWII



Holocaust against Jews

Violence patterns during WWII



Political prisoners in Sachsenhausen camp

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 - military contest vs barbarian chaos, battle for hearts and minds, ...
- Key aspect: distinction between **battle violence** and **violence against civilians**
 - Blurry in civil wars: what distinguishes a combatant from a civilian?
 - Compare with idea of civilians in interstate wars and *jus in bello* (IHL)

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 - 'Object' of fighting (a civil war is a war over sovereignty, political rule needs some support, etc), role of support and obedience, etc

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(*) 'Informality' of civil wars (less rules, less hierarchy, less central planning)

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- **What's the difference between state-based violence and state-based conflicts?**

Types of violence

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- This distinction is based on the actors who perpetrate violence and who are the target of violence
- But when we look at how violence is *used*, there is a lot of variation

Patterns of political violence

(Gutierrez-Sanín & Wood 2017)

Table 1
Definition of “pattern of violence”

Dimension	Definition	Examples (not exhaustive)
Repertoire	The forms of violence in which the organization regularly engages	Homicide, torture, forced displacement, rape, forced abortion, etc.
Targeting	For each element of the repertoire, the social groups against whom the organization regularly engages with that form of violence.	An ethnic group, male members of an ethnic group, political prisoners, prisoners of war, LBGTI persons, combatants of rival organizations, residents of “enemy” village or neighborhood, etc.
Technique	How the organization carries out that form of violence against that social group	Techniques of killing include execution by firearm, execution by machete, shelling, suicide bombing, etc.
Frequency	The count (of events or victims) or the rate of attacks, of victimization or of perpetration by the armed organization using a specified repertoire element, targeting and technique (or their specified aggregates, e.g., the frequency of torture with any technique). If a count, ideally it would include some estimate (however rough) of its uncertainty. If a rate, both the numerator and the denominator should be clearly specified.	For example, take a case in which the repertoire element is torture and the social group is political detainees. (Assume that the analyst is not concerned with differences in technique). If it is possible to estimate frequency, the count would be the incidence (the number of incidents of torture or of persons, along with an estimate of its uncertainty), prevalence, ^a or rate of perpetration, ^b depending on the purpose of the analysis.

A. The number of persons tortured at least once/the number of detainees

B. The number of incidents or persons tortured/the number of members of the relevant unit of the armed organization (all members or the members of the responsible unit, depending on the purpose of the analysis)

- Applied to **armed groups** (rebels, states, etc)

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- For example, what's the pattern of Hamas? FARC?

Patterns of political violence



Sometimes groups are infamously famous for their repertoire

Understanding violence against civilians

- Now the important question, why we observe civilian victimization?

Understanding violence against civilians

**"WHEN TWO ELEPHANTS
FIGHT, IT IS THE GRASS
THAT SUFFERS"**



African Proverb
@AfricanProverbPage



Understanding violence against civilians

Lawrence Eagleburger (US Secr. of State) on Yugoslavia, in 1992:
"this war is not rational. There is no rationality at all about ethnic conflict. It is gut, it is hatred; it's not for any set of values or purposes; it just goes on"

Understanding violence against civilians, pre 2000

- Violence against civilians seen as **collateral violence**
 - Differences because of external factors: available weapons, population density, etc
-
- When *intentionality* could not be ignored (e.g. genocides, ethnic violence): **ancient hatreds**

Understanding violence against civilians, pre 2000

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(There was an exception, actually: those who studied terrorism did view violence against civilians as instrumental)

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- Now we know that violence is an extension of war and an extension of politics

Civilian killings and war

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- Civilians are not bystanders to a war, they play a central role (offering support, human resources, etc) and, sometimes, they become the object of war
- Most attention on *state-led* violence against civilians: because of their capacities (to inflict violence & to control territory and have access to the civilian population), states have usually been the main perpetrators

(Not always: ISIS' infamous record, West African rebel groups, ...)

Civilian killings and war

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- “The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea” (Mao Tse-Tung)
- Response by the state? General Ríos Montt in Guatemala: drain the sea in which the guerrilla swim
- More civilian victimization when state is incapable of withdrawing support to the rebels or defeating them in some other way
- This logic easily leads to mass killing episodes, or ethnic cleansing in contexts whether support is assumed to follow ethnic lines

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- Terrorism is a classic example: use of civilian killings to extract concessions from governments (particularly in democratic regimes, where people have more leverage)
- But rebel groups can also use violence to gain cooperation from civilians (typically, with territorial control)
 - Weinstein 2007: if you depend on civilian cooperation for critical resources, you don't kill them, but if you extract your wealth from natural resources or external financing, you have less incentives not to kill

The politics of civilian killings

- Another point of view focuses on the political logic of victimization, which also applies to civilian killings *outside* war
 - What are the incentives of elites to engage in or promote violence against civilians?

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 - What are the incentives of elites to engage in or promote violence against civilians?
- Main idea: political elites obtain political benefits by promoting violence
 - Does not necessarily lead to mass violence, but it can

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- One example: ethnic outbidding
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- Getting away with violence
 - Use more violence against opposition, media control, public cost vs private incentives, etc

The microdynamics of civil wars

- New type of studies after the mid-2000s: studying within-conflict dynamics, using micro-level data

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- Goal: know *what* happened during a conflict and *why* we see different levels of violence across different regions or municipalities
- (Problem? More difficult to generalize)

The microdynamics of civil wars

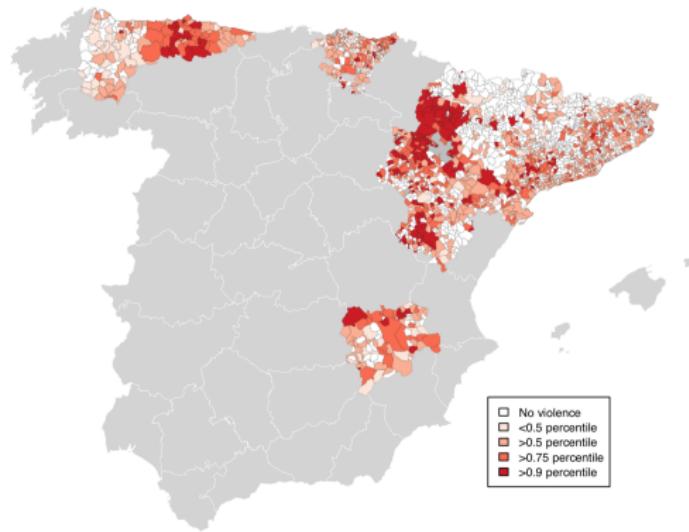


Figure 5.2: Wartime victimization by Francoist forces (1936-1942)

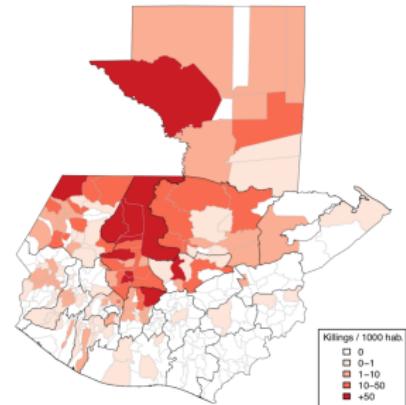


Figure 6.6: State violence against civilians in Guatemala, 1978–1985

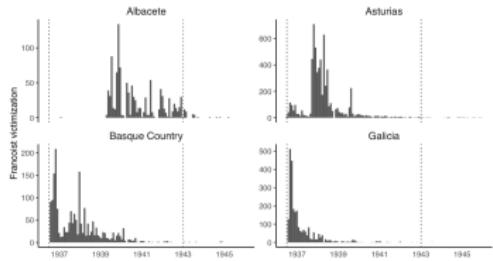
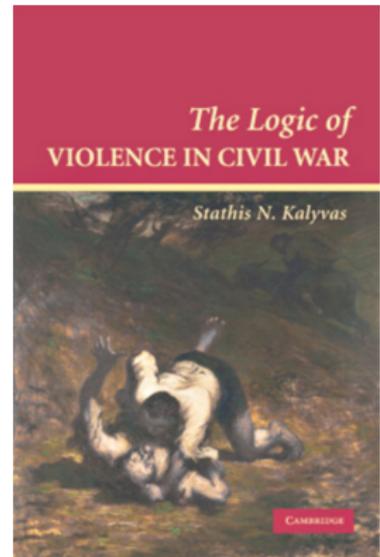


Figure 5.3: Wartime victimization by Francoist authorities over time

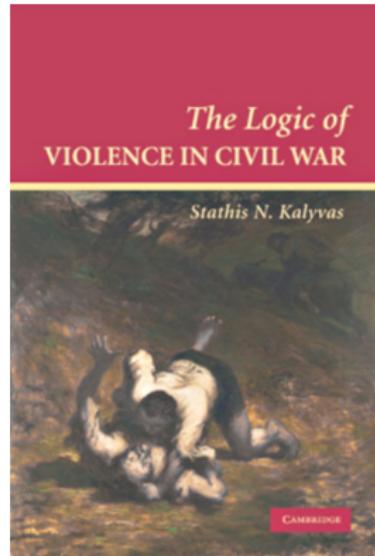
The microdynamics of civil wars



Stathis Kalyvas (2006)

The microdynamics of civil wars

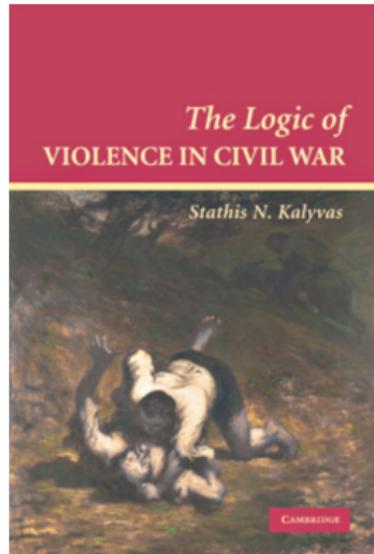
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Stathis Kalyvas (2006)

The microdynamics of civil wars

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- The setting: collaboration between local actors and external enforcers
 - what do I gain or lose from collaborating with an armed actor? (e.g. rebels)
 - and when do armed actors have incentives to use violence?



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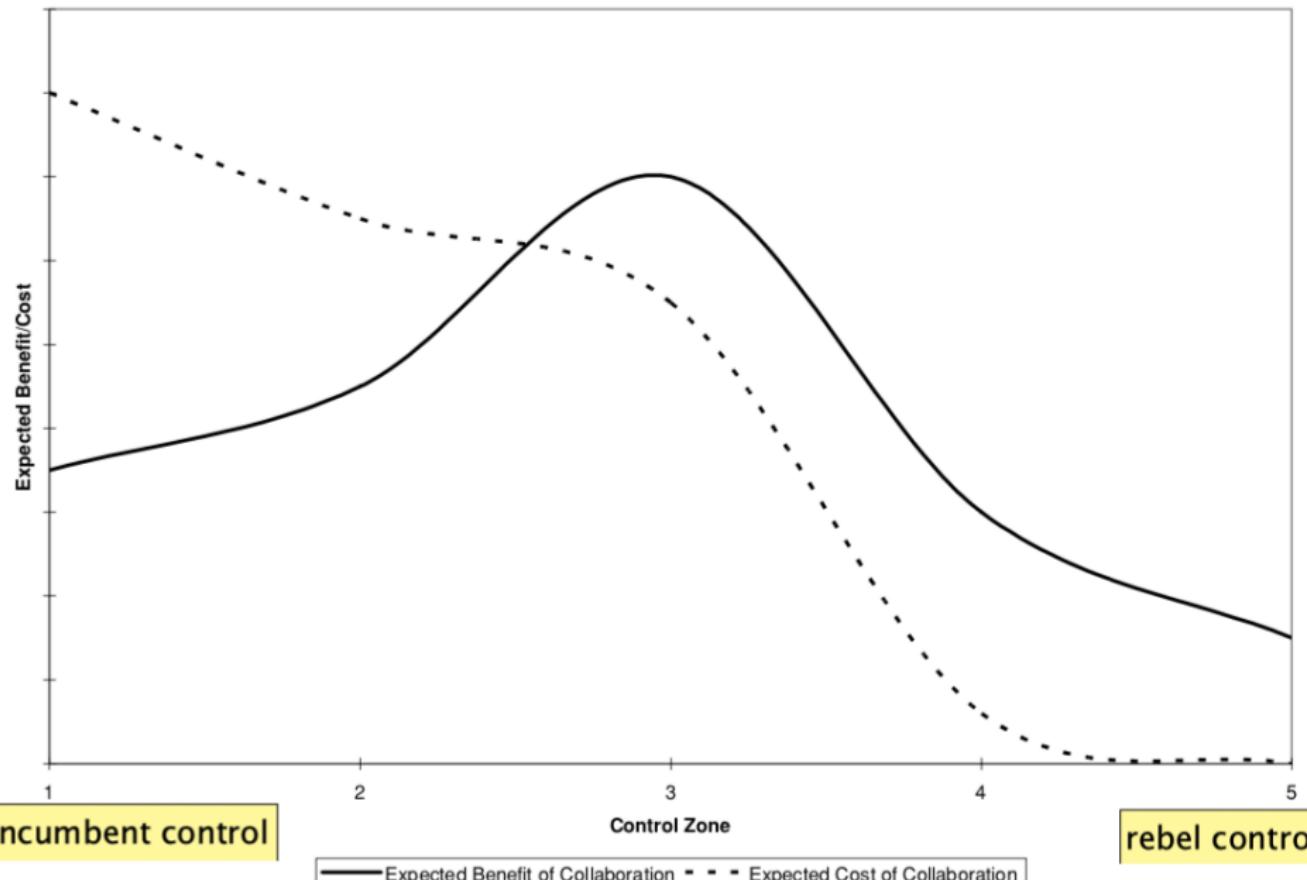


FIGURE 7.2. Payoffs and Expected Cost of Collaboration with (or Defection to) Insurgents

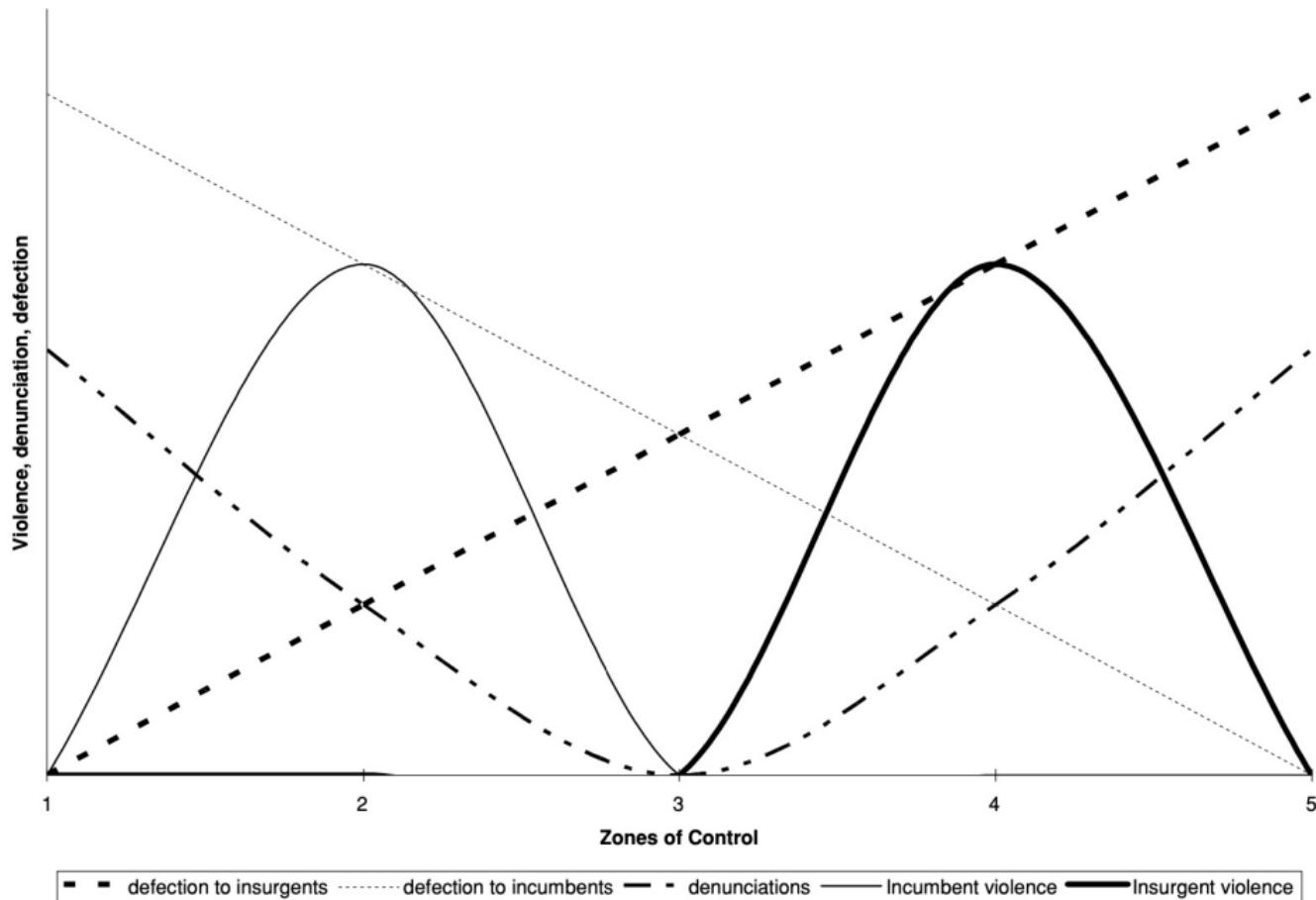
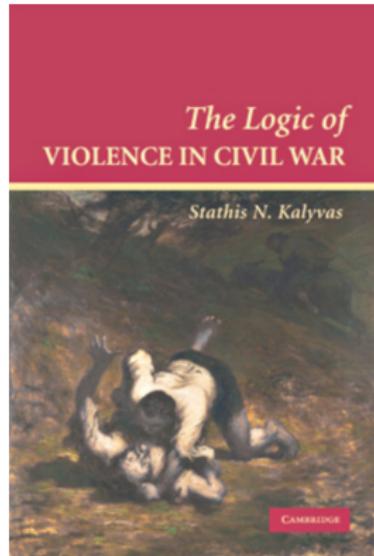


FIGURE 7.7. Predicted Pattern of Selective Violence, Defection, and Denunciation

The microdynamics of civil wars

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- The setting: collaboration between local actors and external enforcers
 - what do I gain or lose from collaborating with an armed actor? (e.g. rebels)
 - and when do armed actors have incentives to use violence?
- We should see more violence in areas where territorial control is not full

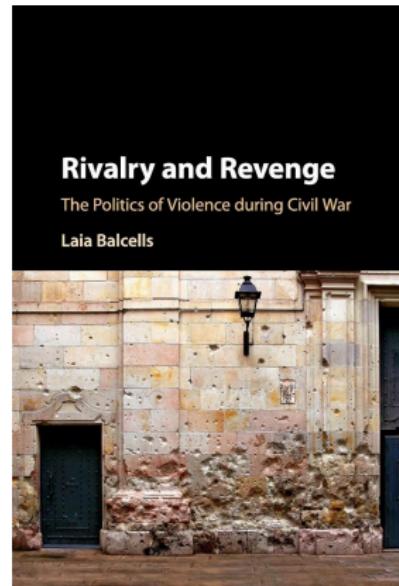


Stathis Kalyvas (2006)

Personal motives or politics?



Abbey Steele (2017)



Laia Balcells (2017)

- Two extensions to Kalyvas' model highlighting the role of *political identity* in understanding wartime violence

Personal motives or politics?

- Kalyvas' perspective emphasized that civil war violence emerges out of local grievances or feuds, private conflicts, vendettas, etc... and was *later* interpreted along the master cleavage of the war

Personal motives or politics?

- Kalyvas' perspective emphasized that civil war violence emerges out of local grievances or feuds, private conflicts, vendettas, etc... and was *later* interpreted along the master cleavage of the war
- But do political identities play a role?
- Think about the Spanish Civil War: is it that 'reds' killed 'blues' and vice-versa, or was violence produced by land disputes and enmities among neighbors who took advantage of the war to settle these conflicts?

Personal motives or politics?

- Colombia: after elections were held, paramilitary groups could identify civilians perceived as loyal to the insurgents and implement political cleansing on those municipalities
- Spain: more *direct* violence against civilians in those municipalities where electoral competition was higher, and a second round of violence motivated by revenge after territorial control changed
- Also in Spain: *indirect* violence (e.g. bombings) directed at those areas that had politically supported the opposite side before the war

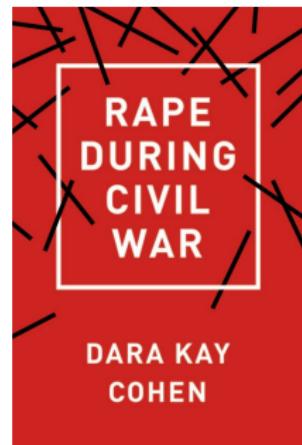
Explaining killings

- The key idea is that killing civilians often responds to **strategic incentives**, not so much to irrationality
- The Q (or what changes from context to context) is about those incentives
- Understanding the structure of incentives helps understand most violence against civilians

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 - cases of *irrational* violence?

Beyond fatal violence

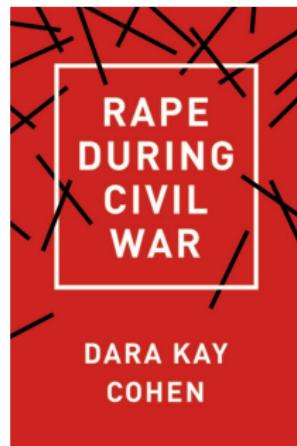


Dara Kay Cohen (2016)

Beyond fatal violence

1. Opportunistic rape

(earlier perspective, anarchy during civil wars)



Dara Kay Cohen (2016)

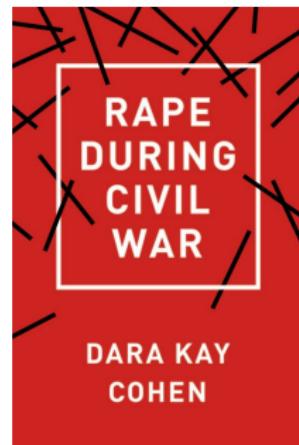
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2. Strategic violence

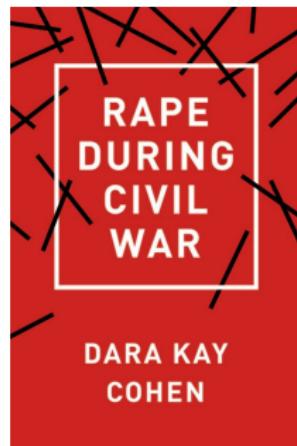
(sowing fear, damaging the enemy, spoils of war, ...)



Dara Kay Cohen (2016)

Beyond fatal violence

1. Opportunistic rape
(earlier perspective, anarchy during civil wars)
2. Strategic violence
(sowing fear, damaging the enemy, spoils of war, ...)
3. Rape as a practice



Dara Kay Cohen (2016)

Beyond fatal violence

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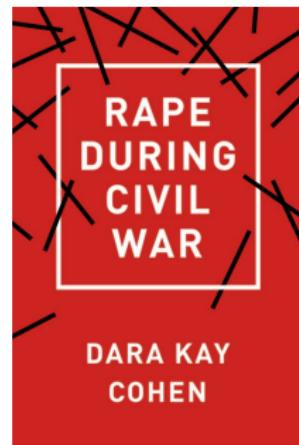
(earlier perspective, anarchy during civil wars)

2. Strategic violence

(sowing fear, damaging the enemy, spoils of war, ...)

3. Rape as a practice

e.g. Cohen (right): gang rape as a socialization practice within armed groups, more likely when there is *forced recruitment*



Dara Kay Cohen (2016)

Other examples from the Spanish civil war?

- Low-level internal purges and collective targeting
 - Purges of schoolteachers ('The Double Logic of Internal Purges')
- Preemptive violence and local mobilizers
 - Anticlerical violence

Zooming out: Why are civil wars so violent?

Grand perspectives:

1. **Hobbessian anarchy**
(collapse of political authority)
2. Transgression (of the norms of war and violence)
(no rules apply during a war)
3. Schmittian polarization
(political or ethnic rivalry)
4. Technology of warfare
(explained by the way a civil war is fought)

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