

# Poli-416: REVOLUTION & POLITICAL VIOLENCE

DÉDIÉ  
AU GOUVERNEMENT  
de la  
CONFÉDÉRATION GRENADE.  
HOMMAGE de L'AUTEUR

# Is violence “random”?

## Mexican Cartel Skins Rival's Face, Stitches It on Soccer Ball

by | Associated Press



MEXICO CITY – The body of 36-year-old Hugo Hernandez was left on the streets of Los Mochis in seven pieces as a chilling threat to members of the Juarez drug cartel. A note read: "Happy New Year, because this will be your last."



Mapiripán massacre in Colombia

# Is violence “random”?

Public discourse on violence as chaotic or random



Rwandan genocide

# Logic of Violence in Civil Wars

Why “logic”?

Violence in civil wars as end result of *rational calculation*

Not random or “driven by passions”

# Violence in irregular war

Three actors: incumbent (state), insurgents (rebels), and civilians

Incumbent wants to eliminate insurgents

Insurgent wants to outlast incumbent, extract concessions, or defeat

# Information is key

Fundamental characteristic of irregular warfare  
is the ***identification problem*** =  
Inability to distinguish between combatant and civilian

Civilians are a key source of information

The extent to which civilians **collaborate** with combatants will determine  
shape of violence

# Two forms of violence

## Selective violence

Executed against specific *individuals*

Assassinations, murders, “lists”, drone strikes

Casualty-free, “clean”, moderate, accurate

## Indiscriminate violence

Executed *en masse*; group-level membership

Massacres, chemical attacks, displacement

Random or wanton

# Indiscriminate violence

Deployed against people based on group membership

Driven by a lack of information

Group membership is a “*heuristic*”; what kinds of “groups”?

The goal is to **induce** collaboration,  
have civilian suffering **pressure rebels to surrender**

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There will be trouble in Missouri until the Secesh [Secessionists] are *subjugated* and made to know that they are not only powerless, but that any desperate attempts to make trouble here will only bring upon them *certain* destruction and this [certainty] of their condition must not be confined to Soldiers and fighting men, but must extend to non-combatant men and women.<sup>77</sup>

# Assad's chemical attacks

Syrian army used artillery, chemical weapons against  
**rebel strongholds**

## 1982 Hama massacre

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

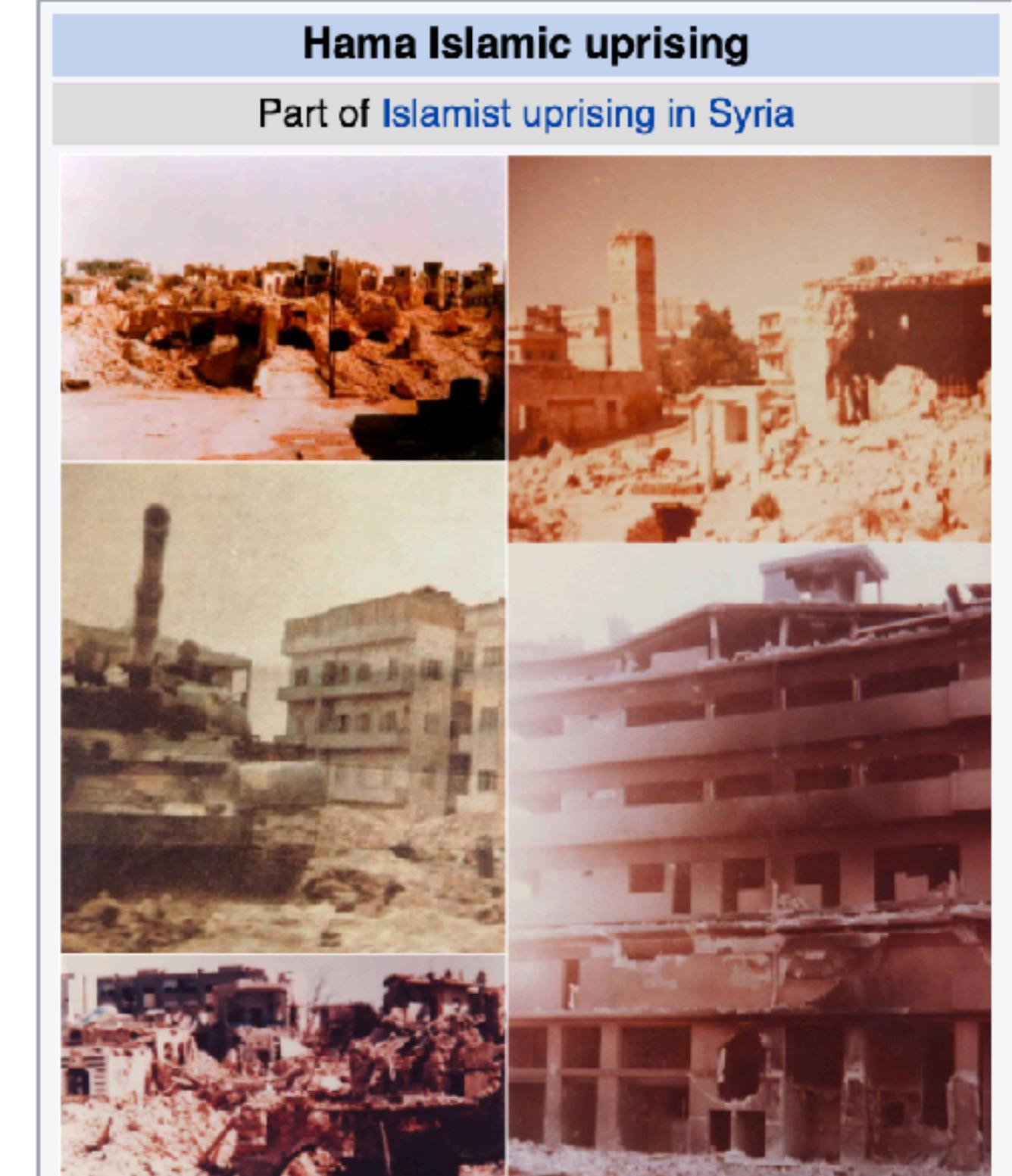
*Not to be confused with the [2012 Hama massacre](#) or the [1981 Hama massacre](#).*

NEWS / SYRIA'S WAR

## US accuses Syria's Assad of chemical attack in Idlib

*Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says Syrian government forces used chlorine during an attack in May this year.*

26 Sept 2019



## Syria activists: Airstrikes knock out hospitals in rebel-held Aleppo

By [Laura Smith-Spark](#), [Eyad Kourdi](#) and [Kareem Khadder](#), CNN

⌚ Updated 1:45 AM ET, Sun November 20, 2016

# Example:

## Forced displacement in Colombia

Apartadó, Colombia once bastion of leftist politics  
and guerrilla stronghold



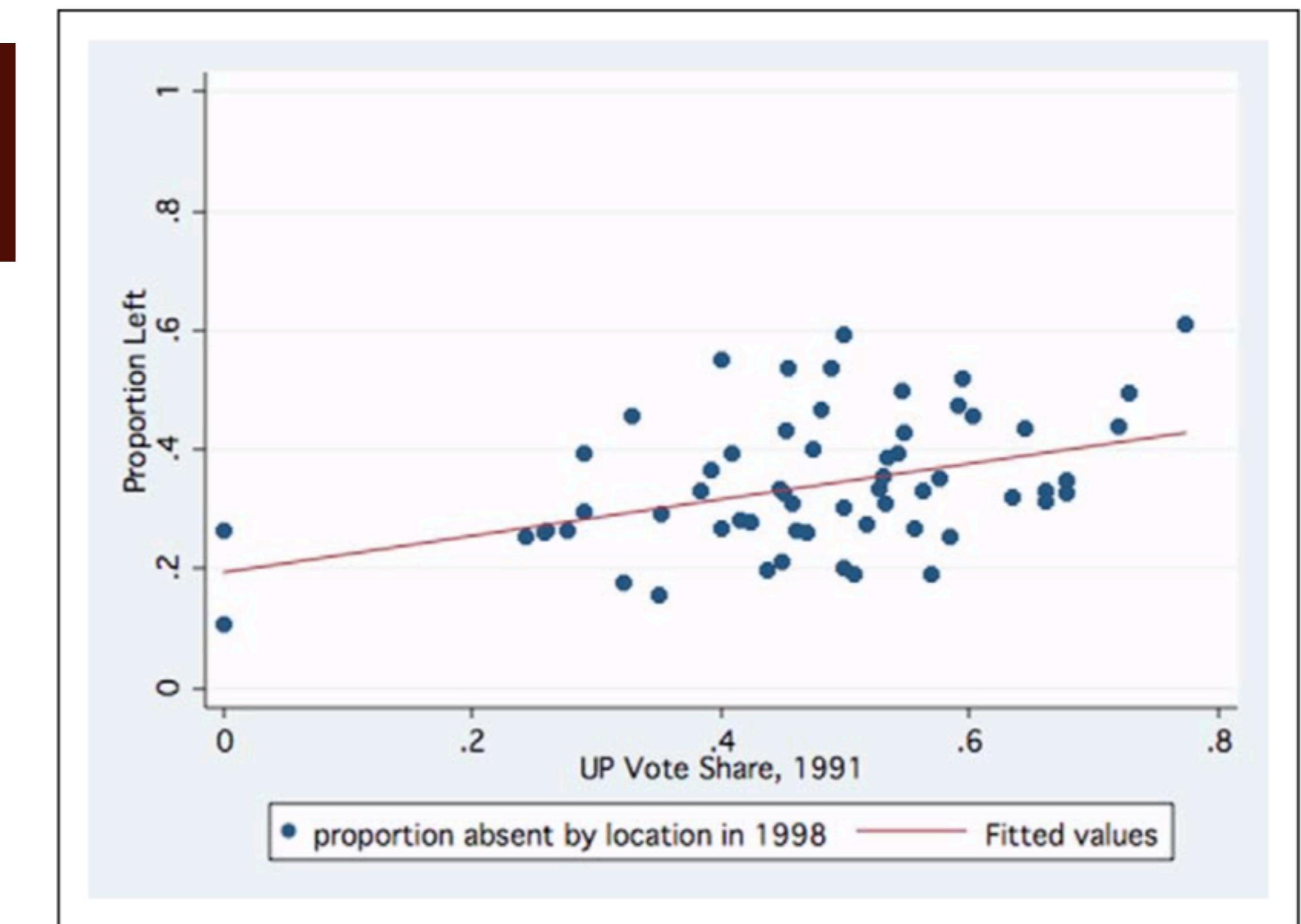
Paramilitaries want to eliminate guerrillas but **can't identify them**

# Example: Forced displacement in Colombia

In 1986 FARC decide to run for office,  
as a party (UP)

Villages that voted for the UP  
disproportionately *displaced*

Elections can be a source of  
**information**



**Figure 2.** Proportion absent from polling stations, by Unión Patriótica (UP) vote share

# Indiscriminate violence

Likely when combatant faces steep **imbalance of power** and where **resources and information are low**

Most often used by **incumbents** (but not always); why?

Paramilitaries had almost no footing in Apartadó

Syrian army had struggled to control Aleppo

Indiscriminate violence is **cheaper** than selective violence; why?

# Governments have information deficits

WORLD NEWS

SEPTEMBER 19, 2019 / 3:25 AM / 11 DAYS AGO

States almost always know less about local population than insurgents

Civilians always suffer under occupation

## U.S. drone strike kills 30 pine nut farm workers in Afghanistan

Ahmad Sultan, Abdul Qadir Sediqi

4 MIN READ



JALALABAD, Afghanistan (Reuters) - A U.S. drone strike intended to hit an Islamic State (IS) hideout in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians resting after a day's labor in the fields, officials said on Thursday.

Angered by the attack, some residents of Nangarhar province demanded an apology and monetary compensation from the U.S. government.

“Such mistakes cannot be justified. American forces must realize (they) will never win the war by killing innocent civilians,” said Javed Mansur, a resident of Jalalabad city.

Scores of local men joined a protest against the attack on Thursday morning as they helped carry the victims' bodies to Jalalabad city and then to the burial site.

# It doesn't really work

“Indiscriminate violence is **unlikely to achieve its aims** where the presence of a rival makes defection possible”

“Indiscriminate violence...**erases the relationship between crime and punishment**... innocence is irrelevant and compliance is utterly impossible.”

# No lesson is learned

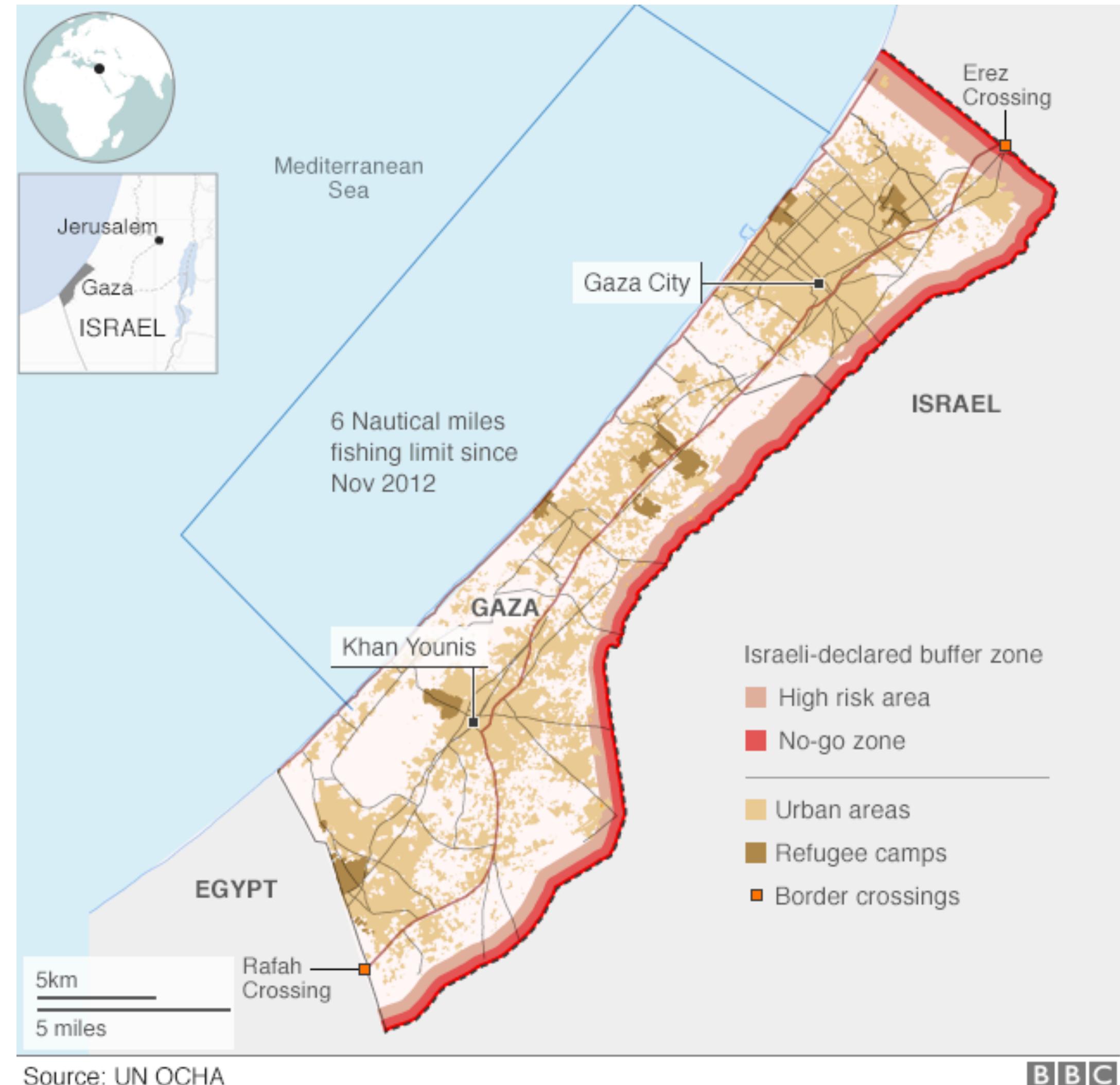
Collective punishment (indiscriminate violence) means there is  
**no way to comply or avoid punishment**

But cooperation with enemy may **increase** odds of survival

*“If I stay with the Germans, I shall be shot when the Bolsheviks come; if the Bolsheviks don’t come, I shall be shot sooner or later by the Germans. Thus, if I stay with the Germans, it means certain death; if I join the partisans, I shall probably save myself.”*

The Nazi War against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944

# Example: Gaza



# Pushing civilians into rebel arms

Insurgents may even **welcome** indiscriminate violence from the other side; examples?

**Why Hamas stores its weapons inside hospitals, mosques and schools**

By [Tessier-McCoy](#)



The party was correct in its judgment that [enemy bombing]...would drive additional segments of the population into opposition...where they would have no alternative but to follow the Party's leadership to obtain protection.”

From Vietnam War

# Counterproductive effects

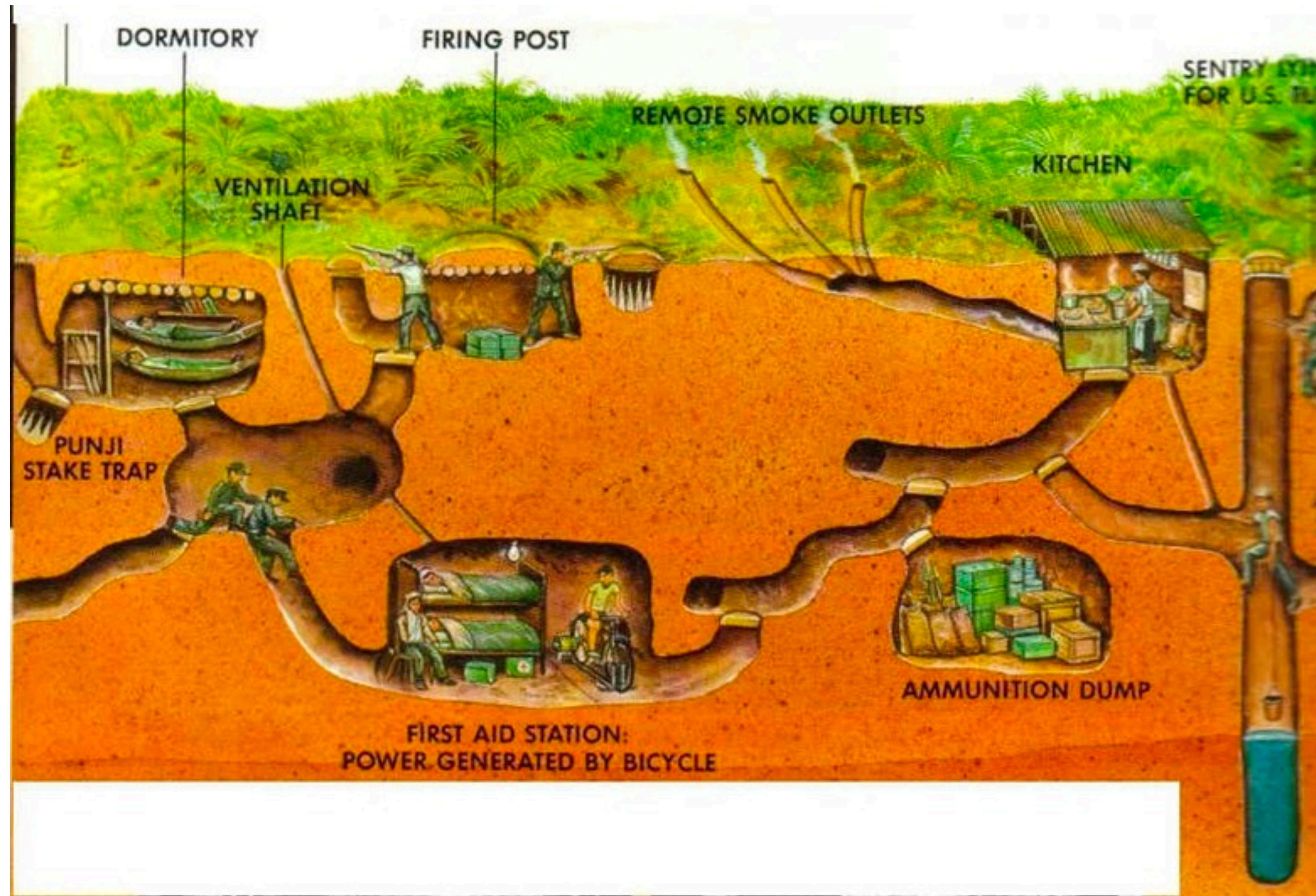
Emotional responses, desire for vengeance

Reverse discrimination, where innocent stay and guilty flee

Selective incentives for rivals  
Rebels can provide safety in return for cooperation

# Selective incentives:

# Tunnel system in Vietnam



# Why use it then?

Selective violence too costly, no information

Anger, “irrationality”

Institutional distortions, e.g:

Why was such a policy allowed to go on? The underlying cause was, Sheehan argues, the failure to curb “institutional proclivities.” On the one hand, there was competition within the U.S. military between different branches, and the Air Force was quite successful in promoting bombings: it was in the personal interest of the Air Force Chief and of his institution to believe that the bombing furthered the war effort, and so he believed it.<sup>196</sup> Moreover, processes of learning were undermined by the fast one-year or 6-month rotation period for military personnel: as soon as a military advisor began to understand the situation, he had to go back.<sup>197</sup> Thus, the U.S. military system provided for the unlearning rather than the learning of lessons. On the other hand, South Vietnamese officers saw artillery shelling as an easy way to show that they were aggressive without running the risks of actual “search and destroy” operations. Commanders at all levels who only engaged in shelling could still retain their command and even be promoted, while those who took risks might be relieved if they suffered a setback or sustained heavy losses.<sup>198</sup>

# Selective violence

Executed against specific *individuals* based on **denunciations**

Requires intimate knowledge of person you are denouncing

**Political** denunciations

“loyalty-driven”

Denounce out of loyalty to cause

**Personal** denunciations

“private” or “manipulative”

Motives **unconnected** to war

E.g., old feuds, tribal animosity

# Example: political denunciations

Ardent supporters of Mao during Cultural Revolution  
turning in family/friends/teachers as *counter-revolutionary*

Red Guards under Mao  
(check out *The Three Body Problem*)



# Example: personal denunciations

Germans (**accurately**)  
denouncing Jewish neighbors  
to steal property

Afghans (**falsely**) denouncing  
neighbors as Taliban/AQ to  
steal farm, revenge

Because of the totalitarian state's exceptional willingness to receive denunciations from its citizens and to act upon them, that state's formidable powers were in effect put at the disposal of individual citizens. If you have a private enemy, why not denounce him to the police as a Jew or Trotskyite? Then the Gestapo or the NKVD would take him away to a concentration camp, and your problem would be solved. . . . This kind of manipulative denunciation was extremely common in both societies. Class enemies were denounced in Stalin's Soviet Union by neighbors who coveted their apartments; Jews were denounced by neighbors in Nazi Germany for the same purpose, and with similar success.<sup>119</sup>



# Denunciation in Ethnic Conflict

Denunciations in ethnic conflicts is relatively **rare**; why?

Visible markers means there is less uncertainty about who is on what side

Anyone who belongs to other side will be killed or forced to flee

# How to get (accurate) denunciations

Set up committees, local activists

Offer incentives, “wanted” posters

**Information that brings to justice...**

**Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**  
**Up to \$25 Million Reward**



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, also known as Abu Du'a, also known as Ibrahim 'Awwad Ibrahim 'Ali al-Badri, is the senior leader of the terrorist organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The threat that al-Baghdadi poses has increased significantly since the Department of State's initial \$10 million reward offer for

Cross-reference accusations

# But accuracy is very difficult

Phoenix program =  
joint South Vietnam - USA information gathering on Vietcong

94% of likely Vietcong go free

32% of low-likelihood go free

Estimate: 38 innocents per 1 Vietcong

Selective violence not **accurate**

TABLE 1  
PHOENIX PROGRAM RESULTS BY CONFIRMATION STATUS FROM JANUARY 1971

Status	Confirmed Vietcong	Unconfirmed Vietcong	Total
Killed	4.53% (366)	20.32% (10,341)	18.16% (10,707)
Captured	1.35% (109)	32.21% (16,392)	27.98% (16,501)
Defected	0.21% (17)	15.33% (7,801)	13.26% (7,818)
At Large	93.91% (7,587)	32.14% (16,355)	40.60% (23,942)
Total	100.00% (8,079)	100.00% (50,889)	100.00% (58,968)
Killed + Captured	5.88% (475)	52.53% (26,733)	46.14% (27,208)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense, NPIASS-II.  
 $\text{Pr}(\chi^2) = 0.000$

# The goal

Combatants want to establish  
**perception of credible selection**

This hurts enemy and produces  
**deterrence**; how?

They need **accurate** denunciations  
and **high** collaboration

What produces **false** or **missing** denunciations?

Private motives

**Fear of retaliation**

# Retaliation

Fear of retaliation keeps civilians from sharing information with incumbents

Civilians are made to fear retaliation  
**on purpose**

## The Tragic Fate of the Afghan Interpreters the U.S. Left Behind

These men risked their lives for the U.S. military. Now many would like to come to America but are stranded — and in danger

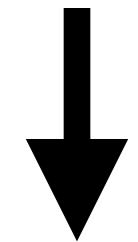
By T.A Frail; Photographs by Erin Trieb

SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE | [SUBSCRIBE](#)

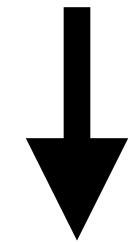
NOVEMBER 2016

# This is where control comes in

Degree of territorial control **determines access to rival group** and **level of protection**



Amount of denunciation and collaboration



Amount of selective violence

# This crazy graph

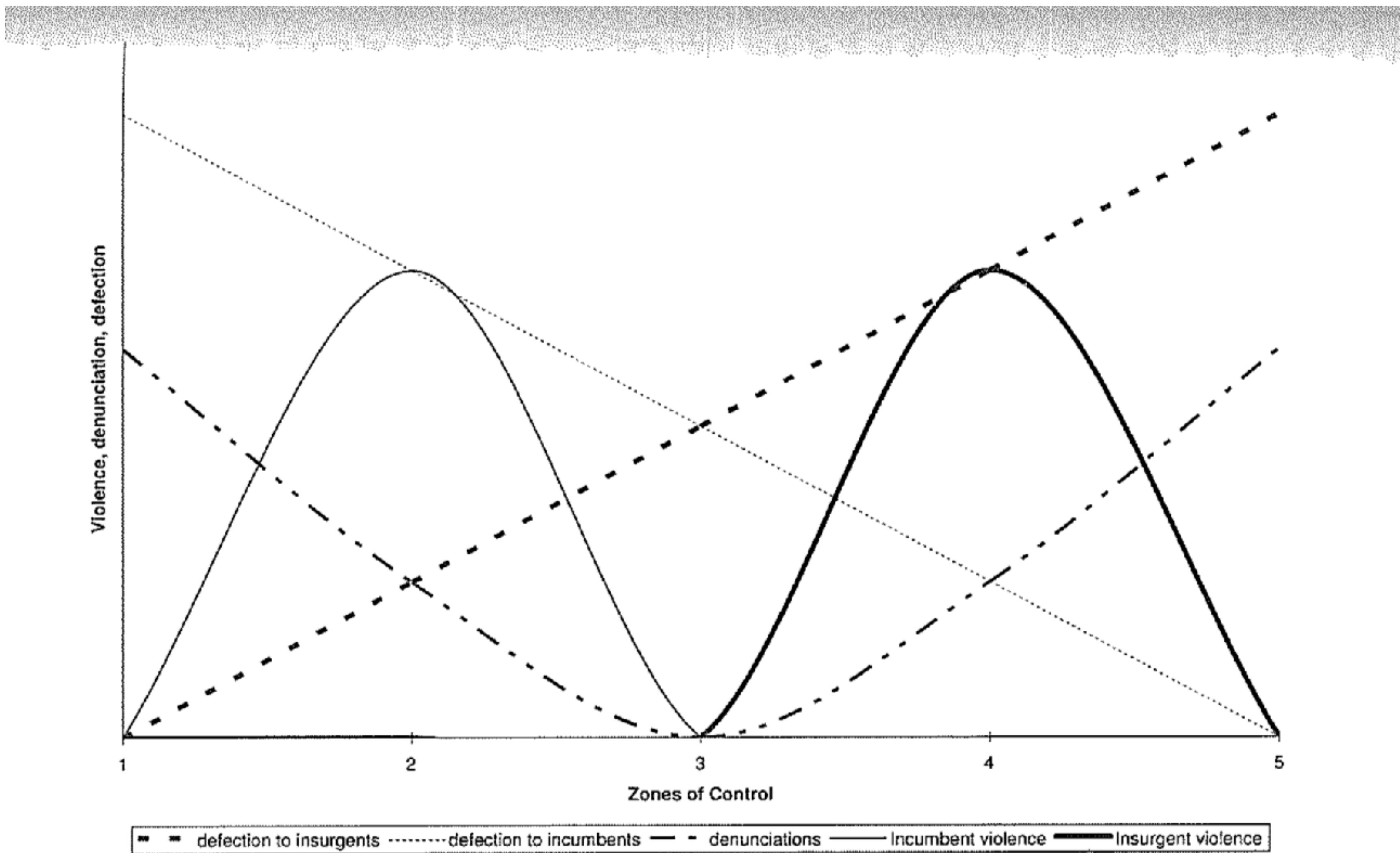


FIGURE 7.7. Predicted Pattern of Selective Violence, Defection, and Denunciation

# Control, violence, and denunciations

defect?

denounce?

selective?

indiscriminate?

When control is  
high

No-one to defect to

No-one to denounce

No selective violence

High indiscriminate  
violence (by other  
side)

When control is  
matched

Lots of defection

No denunciation

No selective violence

When control is  
uneven

Some defection

Some denunciation

Some selective violence

# Recap

All else equal, combatants would rather use violence  
**selectively**

Type of violence is a function of **information**

Availability of information is in turn a function of **control**

More and better **information** is available under high control

As control **shifts**, so should the kind of violence that we observe