



## The Logic of Violence in Civil War

*Stathis N. Kalyvas*

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By analytically decoupling war and violence, this book explores the causes and dynamics of violence in civil war. Against the prevailing view that such violence is an instance of impenetrable madness, the book demonstrates that there is logic to it and that it has much less to do with collective emotions, ideologies, and cultures than currently believed. Kalyvas specifies a novel theory of selective violence: it is jointly produced by political actors seeking information and individual civilians trying to avoid the worst but also grabbing what opportunities their predicament affords them. Violence, he finds, is never a simple reflection of the optimal strategy of its users; its profoundly interactive character defeats simple maximization logics while producing surprising outcomes, such as relative nonviolence in the 'frontlines' of civil war.

## **The Logic of Violence in Civil War Details**

Date : Published May 1st 2006 by Cambridge University Press (first published June 29th 2002)

ISBN : 9780521670043

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Format : Paperback 485 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, War, History, Politics, Political Science, Military History, Civil War, International Relations, Academic

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## **From Reader Review The Logic of Violence in Civil War for online ebook**

### **Caleb Parks says**

A fantastic study on the spatial distribution of power in an insurgency. Highly recommended for geeks...

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### **Alex Linschoten says**

Pretty good. Approaches a topic for which the evidence is mostly qualitative with a quantitative eye, mixed in with various logical hypotheses etc.

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### **Anand Gopal says**

A brilliant, indispensable book for anyone who covers, studies, or cares about modern conflict. Chapter 2, on the biases of studying civil war, is alone worth the price of admission. Kalyvas convincingly argues, among other things, to de-emphasize the role of ideology in analysis and for a hyper-local perspective to understand the logic of violence in civil war. And his chapters on coercion and control help illuminate war-time dynamics in places like Afghanistan or Syria far better than most books about those countries.

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### **Colm Fox says**

There is a lot in this book. At its core Kalyvas presents an original rationalist explanation on a narrow and well-defined aspect of violence in civil wars - that of selective violence. While his theory is convincing, I particularly enjoyed his very extensive literature review and the overall novelty of his research design and methodology.

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### **Christopher says**

I consider this pretty much the core text for this subject and heavily recommend all IR students read it no matter what they study or their theoretical persuasion.

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### **Jaron Roux says**

Loved the organization of this book. Wonderful layout and presentation of the argument. In the end his two theories (1) Irregular warfare based on collaboration & control and then on selective violence are very useful in dissecting the dynamics of violence in civil war. I don't understand his model of selective violence, but I get the point of the model which is to tell us something about the cross-national variation in violence. Based on

the variable of indiscriminate violence and control we can learn a tremendous amount about the character of civil war and man's behavior around this activity. More to follow after class.

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### **Eric says**

Great book if you are looking for an extremely technical study of levels of violence in civil conflict. Otherwise, pretty rough to get through.

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### **Gill says**

The Logic of Violence in Civil War. Analytically separates violence and civil war. Where does violence occur, when, why cannot be explained by the original causes of war!!! (SO simple, yet powerful observation.) He builds a model to look at this... still reading it.

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### **Ian Fleischmann says**

First, this is a social science book. It has large-N studies and charts and statistics. If you're not into that, you will probably end up skipping around in the chapters. That being said, Kalyvas kindly structured his chapters in clearly demarcated sections with easily identifiable conclusions. If you don't want to peruse the statistics, you can skip right to the results.

Second, for anyone who has spent any time breaking apart the complexity of a local environment, this book will have few, if any, revelations. ('Oh wait, these guys who claim to be Jaysh al Mahdi are really just local thugs exacting their revenge on neighborhood bullies?' or 'Gee, that guy really doesn't agree with everything al Qaeda does but he is compelled to join based on personal and family vulnerability?') Personal motivations matter and movements are not nearly as homogeneous as they would have you believe. In the end, I can only read his conclusions and say "that makes perfect sense." The benefit is that now I have scientific analysis of a range of conflicts to back up my beliefs where before they were based on circumstantial evidence.

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### **SpaceBear says**

Kalyvas seeks to understand the nature of strategic violence in civil wars, while also attempting to explain the reasons that violence in civil wars is more intense than in intrastate conflicts. It asserts that a key reason for this is the dual processes of segmentation (zones controlled monopolistically by rival actors) as well as fragmentation (dual sovereignty on overlapping territory). It also argues that violence is most likely in an area where one side has a near hegemonic control, as violence can not be used in areas where it is competing for authority. Uses the Greek Civil War as the primary case study.

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## **Nate Huston says**

Loved it. Among other things, Kalyvas introduces a theory of violence in civil wars that asserts that selective violence (versus indiscriminate) is "jointly produced by political actors seeking information and individual noncombatants trying to avoid the worst but also grabbing what opportunities their predicament affords them." (inside cover) Bottom line: violence in civil wars is a two-way street with political actors manipulating local leaders in pursuit of information needed to perpetrate selective violence (in order to control) and individuals co-opting organizations and the civil war itself in order to harm other individuals for reasons that may or may not have anything directly to do with the war itself. He calls it the "privatization of political violence." In civil war, individuals decide whether to defect or not and whether to denounce or not. Organizations choose between indiscriminate and selective violence. All three of these are mutually dependent and characterize the nature and level of violence in the war.

One inconsistency I had trouble wrapping my nugget around was Kalyvas's (general) dismissal of the Hobbsian nature of man as cause of barbarism in civil war. Essentially, he asserts that these wars become violent specifically because of man's *aversion* to violence & bloodthirstiness and therefore uses the civil war as proxy or agent to carry out violence against his nature. Basically, he opines that a man really wants a guy dead, but doesn't have the cajones to do it himself and so enlists the organization as his agent through denunciation. However, he also references the "particularly disturbing...observation about the lack of proportion between the nature of the offense and the size of the sanction caused by the denunciation." (p 350) In other words, the denouncer knows the denouncee is about to get it, but does it anyway. I'd be interested to explore that topic further: what is it that allows a man to (essentially) facilitate his neighbor's death even when he could not do it himself? Perhaps man is a bit more Hobbsian than Kalyvas lets on.

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## **Kw Estes says**

In this book Kalyvas introduces his readers to a startling and de-idealized new vision of the mechanics of civil war. Through a great deal of research, both localized in Greece and more far-ranging, Kalyvas has come to the idea that the great majority of modern civil war violence is related less to such highly-regarded factors as ideology, class, or ethnicity as it is to the war's endogenous realities. That is, a village will tend to follow the lead of whatever power occupies it at any given time, whether that power be insurgents or incumbents. This is shown to be true regardless of where the villagers 'true' allegiances may lie. Survival trumps other factors and 'rationality' wins the day.

The idea of the endogenous nature of civil war violence fits perfectly into Kalyvas' broader notion of civil war as a largely local phenomenon. Despite the ex post facto legends and fables of civil wars with clear dividing lines between conservatives and liberals, the high and low classes, etc., local cleavages often do not follow these types at all, and when they do it is often in name only. Instead, Kalyvas illustrates with incredible clarity that local cleavages are often either continuances of pre-war feuds or a personalization of civil war politics in which villagers use the war as pretext to do harm to their personal enemies that has little to do with the war and would neither be possible or desirable without it.

This text is a must-read for anybody trying to gain a deeper understanding of insurgencies and civil wars. It is so lucid that it makes one wonder how they did not think up all of these ideas before. Though a bit repetitive at times, its proliferation of ideas and use of such various and valuable sources more than makes up for its faults.

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## Scott says

Recommended reading for anyone interested in understanding the complexity of counterinsurgency.

Kalyvas clarifies the tenuous games that civilians must play as counterinsurgents (incumbents) and insurgents vie for their allegiance. His research is think; he uses dozens of historical cases to determine the patterns of interaction that we still see today. Written in 2007, his research and conclusions are absolutely applicable to today.

We read this in the US Army SAMS program. All of us with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan were rewarded with an clear explanation for what we saw.

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## Colin says

A very solidly argued examination of the sources of violence in civil war. Although it was a significant undertaking to get through, this may be one of the best-structured political science books I've read to date — the author lays out his concepts, proceeds methodically through alternative hypotheses, spells out his theory and then drills down into a detailed case study analysis based on quantitative and qualitative research, closing out with two chapters further unpacking the theory's implications. A chapter at the outset on the biases that confound the study of violence is worth the read on its own as a caution to any researcher, as is the subsequent chapter dissecting alternative hypotheses that attempt to explain the prevalence of violence. For the most part this is also clearly written throughout, and clearly the product of a tremendous literature review of other studies of civil wars.

The main argument posits that varying levels of incumbent and insurgent control — from total to equally contested by both — predict levels of indiscriminate and selective violence in a civil war. This is, Kalyvas argues, because violence in civil war is a product both of the traditional combatant organizations (who provide the means of violence) and information provided by civilian actors living in their areas of control. In areas of total control, civilians who might theoretically hope to defect to the other side have little means of access the opposing party, and are effectively forced to collaborate or otherwise accommodate themselves to the ruling power, who has only limited need for coercive violence in the absence of meaningful alternatives. Opponents who lack access to the area are reduced to using indiscriminate violence. In areas of dominant but incomplete control, civilians have the opportunity to defect to the opposing side, but face high risk of selective violence in response. In areas of parity where both sides of the conflict can potentially carry out reprisals, residents attempt to straddle the fence, limiting the provision of information that would allow the combatants to use selective violence.

The book's biggest contribution is in examining, at length, how civilians in war are active participants, not just a field upon which the insurgents and incumbents act. The chapter on denunciations and their motivations was fascinating, and immediately brought to mind many of the cases from Afghanistan recounted in Anand Gopal's book, among other studies. The chapter on the linkages between national-level political actors and cleavages and local-level disputes was also excellent. The point that external conflict actors offer local residents the means to carry out malicious retribution and exacerbate local conflicts may not be novel, but it is thoroughly documented here.

While Kalyvas tests his theory with case studies from the German occupation of Greece and post-occupation civil war period, his coding of the varying levels of control he observes is a rare area where he does not elaborate his reasoning at length (though he acknowledges elsewhere that there are no precisely agreed measurements for territorial control and suggests this as an area for further study). In “Inside Rebellion”, which I read prior to this, Jacob Weinstein argues that Kalyvas’ theory is not an accurate predictor of the use of violence. He instead attributes the use of indiscriminate or selective violence to the organizational structure of insurgent groups and their corresponding dependence on civilian actors, who Kalyvas presumes both sides of a civil war inevitably turn to for local information. I think a plausible case could potentially be made for integrating the two arguments (though I’m not fully sold on the importance Weinstein attaches to economic endowments in directly shaping organizational practices either) but this is an area that I’d need to read further on, since I’m not closely familiar with the case studies they’re working from.

Still lots to process from this book; even if not applicable in all cases, it’s very much worth the read.

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### **Davin O'regan says**

Far too long. The numerous small examples from various historical cases start to really drag the narrative down. Interesting overall empirical insights and theory.

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