

Stathis N. Kalyvas,

THE LOGIC OF VIOLENCE IN CIVIL WAR,

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In this book Stathis N. Kalyvas makes a key contribution to the study of the phenomenon of political violence in the contemporary world. The volume presents a theory about the dynamics of violence that takes place in the context of civil wars, and particularly in guerrilla wars. The main hypotheses derived from the theory are tested empirically with data from the Greek Civil War (1943-1949) in the province of Argolid, in the Peloponnese peninsula, although the scope of application of the theory is the totality of irregular civil wars taking place in the world. The author manages to make a contribution that goes far beyond his case study thanks to an original research design, which -together with a well-defined theoretical framework and references to other civil wars- gives external validity to the results. Furthermore, Kalyvas derives implications from his theory not only for civil war violence, but also for other types of political violence, i.e. terrorism or riots.

Kalyvas's research question is: what explains spatial variation in the distribution of violence during a civil war? He points out that there are a lack of systematic studies on the determinants of violence taking place in the context of armed conflicts; in previous research, violence has been treated either as functional to the war or as a consequence of madness. While the former argument makes any explanation of violence tautological or circular (violence occurs because armed groups need it), the latter makes it impossible (because, can the effects of madness be systematic in any way?). Even though other authors have recently made attempts to study wartime violence in a systematic way, their explanations are insufficient because they are largely unidimensional; for example, they focus only on the regime where violence takes place, or on the characteristics of the armed groups. Furthermore, in these approximations, it is implicitly assumed that combatants have a constant set of incentives, and that the observed violence varies simply as a result of the existence of greater or lower constraints on violent behavior. Kalyvas, instead, tries to explain violence from the strategic interaction between individuals and armed groups.

Kalyvas's focus is on selective violence, which needs to be distinguished from indiscriminate violence. The criteria that distinguishes them is the mechanism by which victimization takes place: if there is a selection process at the individual level, violence is selective; if the selection process is at the collective level, violence is indiscriminate. Indiscriminate violence is highly counterproductive for armed groups because it sends the signal to civilians that, no matter what they do, they can be the target of violence. Selective violence is much more effective in conquering territory and establishing control over it; and at the same time, it has an interactive nature because assassination requires the acquisition of information on the individual.

Secondly, he focuses on irregular civil wars, where control of the territory by the armed groups is highly fragmented, combatants are mixed with civilians, and war technology consists of light weapons (*vis-à-vis* artillery or heavy weapons). In irregular civil wars, violence is highly linked to the control of territory because combatants need civilian collaboration in order to achieve control –they cannot identify

and eliminate defectors without it; at the same time, without a minimum level of control, it is impossible for the groups to access local information. Kalyvas explains the occurrence of selective violence in these civil wars with a formal model that takes into account the utility functions of civilians and armed groups. The former want to survive during the war, and they undertake actions that allow them to maximize the probability of doing it. At the same time, they have private incentives to eliminate their enemies or people with whom they have private hatreds. Armed groups, on their end, want to maximize territorial control, and they need to obtain information from civilians in order to do it. But the acquisition of information by the groups is conditional on the level of control that the armed group has in a particular territory; civilians only dare to denounce the opponent if they have some sort of guarantee of protection. Thus, selective violence only takes place in those places where the incentives of civilians to collaborate with the armed group intersect with the interests of the group to acquire information on their enemies. In a continuum where full control of the territory by the incumbent is 1, full control by the insurgent is 5, shared control is 3, and hegemonic but not total control by the incumbent and insurgent are 2 and 4 – respectively, Kalyvas predicts that higher levels of violence will take place in zones 2 and 4. These are the two zones in which civilians have incentives to collaborate with the incumbent (in zone 2) or with the insurgent (in zone 4), and in which armed groups have incentives to eliminate potential defectors. In zone 1, the incumbent does not have incentives to acquire information about civilians and to kill them because it already has hegemony over the territory, and the opposite occurs for insurgents in zone 5. In zone 3, while armed groups are surely interested in acquiring information, civilians are not willing to provide it because they do not have any certainty that the armed group will be able to protect them in the case of retaliations. That is why violence is not seen in these frontline zones.

Kalyvas tests the predictions of his model with a self-constructed database of 62 municipalities of the Argolid province, inhabited by 42,000 people before the civil war. He gives a value in the control continuum (from 1 to 5) for four different time periods of the first half of the Greek civil war (September 1943-October 1944), which is the period that most affected this zone militarily. Thus, the totality of units in the database is 248. He presents descriptive statistics of these data, and he performs the empirical test with different regression models (lineal and logistic), with which he confirms that zone 2 explains higher levels of violence by incumbents, and that zone 4 explains higher levels of violence by insurgents. Kalyvas argues that the Argolid province is ideal for the empirical test of his theory because land property was very evenly distributed (i.e. farms had very similar sizes), and therefore economic factors cannot explain different levels of violence; also, the area's geography is quite mountainous, and this clearly made the civil war irregular. Yet, since this zone is predominantly peasant and has high levels of local factionalism, it could be thought that the events in this area were different to those that would take place in other places during the civil war, e.g. in urban contexts. This implies that the results of the analysis might not be easily generalized. In addition to the quantitative data, Kalyvas also presents qualitative evidence in favor of his hypotheses: from the anecdotal evidence of interviewees to primary and secondary historical evidence (e.g. archival data, ethnographies, local histories).

One of the most controversial aspects of Kalyvas book is that it suggests that, during war, there is a privatization of violence, and not a politicization of private life. This challenges the conception of war as an ideological confrontation between opposing sides. Yet, Kalyvas distinguishes the causes of war from the causes of violence, and he does not deny that politics play a role in the former.

The formal model that explains selective violence is sound, and has the virtue of being both complex and parsimonious. Nevertheless, there is something that does not totally fit its apparatus: while at the beginning of the book there is a distinction between the tactical and the strategic dimensions of violence (the former leads to the elimination of current enemies and the latter of future enemies), the formal model seems to take into account only the tactical dimension. If armed groups were interested in eliminating future enemies, they would also be interested in gathering information about civilians in zones of full control (for instance, zone 1 for the incumbent). And, given that denunciation would be very likely from civilians in those circumstances, levels of violence would be high. Another limitation of the theoretical model is that it does not take into account the fact that different stages of the civil war can be associated with different levels of violence. For instance, it might be thought that violence will be greater during the early stages of the war because the necessity to eliminate the enemy will decrease as the war advances.

The model also implies some measurement issues with regard to the distinction between selective and indiscriminate violence: the process by which somebody has been victimized is very often impossible to know – among other reasons, because the actors might mask their preferences or rationalize their acts. The limits of what can be coded as individual or collective identification are therefore blurred: What happens, for instance, if one decides to bomb a whole city for having supported the opposite side? Unless all of their citizens (or all the victims of the bombings) have been identified individually as defectors, violence should be coded as indiscriminate. Yet, if the city had not supported the enemy, it would not have been targeted; thus, the bombing therefore has a selective component.

Before concluding, it is necessary to mention the numerous implications of the book for the existing and forthcoming literature on political violence. Kalyvas backs his analysis on the instrumental action of individuals, and abandons a macro vision of civil war that conceives violence as the result of the clash between antagonistic blocs. Thus, one of his most valuable contributions is in clarifying the distinction between war and warfare in civil war, and in presenting seminal ideas on the factors explaining the latter. Also, Kalyvas has encouraged a research stream consisting in the comparative analysis of different unities within the same case. He has contributed to the abandonment of the idea that cross-national analysis is the only suitable method to study conflict in a systematic way. Overall, Kalyvas analyses a social and political phenomenon on the basis of rigorous methodological individualism, and is keen to break preconceived ideas or prejudices, which too often hinder the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

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