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These difficulties are a result of the book’s focus on the personal and the firsthand events at which Reiss was present and which impressed him. By constraining himself, Reiss privileges the firsthand, but many might have appreciated the intellectual freedom that being an outsider might have brought to his recollections.

In the interest of full disclosure: Reiss refers to me in this volume as a “friend” as he does my longtime colleague William Simon. I take him at his word. He does so in a section in which he describes Simon and I as “radical social constructionists” who are a danger to good sexual science as he sees it (p. 174). He shared his views with Robert K. Merton before the latter’s death, and Merton is quoted as agreeing with him. Our guilty secret is out.


Michael Biggs
_University of Oxford_

The brutal violence unleashed by civil war is usually explained as the result of emotional frenzy or ideological fervor. In this brilliant book, Stathis Kalyvas argues that violence has its own logic, emerging from the interaction between the warring sides and the civilian population. He comprehensively reviews the literature on civil wars, constructs a simple but subtle theory of violence, and tests its predictions against empirical data, including original research on insurgency in Greece during the Second World War.

The scope conditions for the theory are carefully specified. It does not explain the causes of civil war, but rather the incidence of violence against noncombatants (defined broadly as anyone who is not a full-time soldier) after the onset of military conflict. It is also restricted to violence used to maintain or establish rule over a population, excluding violence used to eliminate the population through genocide or forced migration. Kalyvas argues provocatively that incumbent and insurgent forces alike cannot rely on popular support, for various reasons. The geography of military conflict usually diverges from that of political sentiments; for example, communists may draw their greatest support from the cities, but if they take up arms they are forced to remote areas like mountains. Moreover, incessant demands for resources and men inevitably create resentment among the host population, while armed conflict makes it impossible to provide the kind of benefits supplied by a state in peacetime. Cooperation therefore ultimately depends on violence.

Indiscriminate violence, Kalyvas argues, is counterproductive. If the probability of being killed is the same regardless if one cooperates with the occupying power or if one actively supports the opposing side, there
is no incentive to cooperate. The main hypothesis about indiscriminate violence is that, over time, political actors learn to replace it by selective violence, targeting particular named individuals. This kind of violence requires detailed, local information—which can only be supplied by the civilian populace. This leads to Kalyvas’s second provocative claim: selective violence is the joint product of armed groups and civilian informants. Moreover, denunciation is often malicious, as individuals use the opportunity provided by armed conflict to avenge past grievances or to gain material benefits. There is a persistent tension between the armed group, intent on identifying who is really collaborating with their enemy, and ordinary people, intent on settling scores with local rivals.

The key variable determining selective violence in a locality is the degree of armed control. In some zones, either one side or the other exercises total control. Civilian cooperation is largely assured by the threat of violence. Because the enemy is far away, denunciations are implausible, and so selective violence should be low. In other zones, one side dominates, but this control is contested by the other side. Here, selective violence should be high, as the dominant side eliminates those individuals supposed to be helping the enemy. In the last type of zone, both sides exercise partial control; typically the state rules during the day while insurgents take possession at night. The counterintuitive prediction is that selective violence should be low. Although each side would like to liquidate the enemy’s supporters, civilians do not supply the necessary information for fear of being denounced to the other side. On the “front lines” of this irregular war, supporters of each side coexist uneasily in the same village, feigning ignorance. Eventually the balance of control shifts and one side becomes dominant: then civilians become confident enough to denounce their neighbors, and the killings begin.

This theory—which predicts a nonmonotonic relationship between armed control and selective violence—is consistent with secondary sources on a series of irregular wars, from the American Civil War to the Algerian insurgency of the 1990s. The theory’s predictions are tested rigorously with original research on Greece in the 1940s, focusing primarily on the Argolid in 1943–44, when communist-led insurgents fought German occupiers and local collaborators. Using judicial records, along with over a hundred interviews with surviving residents, Kalyvas constructs a detailed record of 725 civilian deaths in 61 villages. German control shifted back and forth across these villages, in response to German strategic decisions (exogenous to the theory). As predicted, selective violence was most prevalent in zones where one side or the other had dominant, but not total, control. Socioeconomic variables, by contrast, failed to predict the level of violence. Almost as interesting as the quantitative predictions is the analysis of “mispredictions.” Some villages had persistently high levels of violence, due to cycles of vengeance; more happily, sometimes the supporters of one side protected their fellow villagers from retribution.
when they exercised dominant control, and this restraint was reciprocated by their opponents when control shifted to the other side.

This book is unusually successful at coupling theory and evidence, though the match is not perfect. The theory concentrates on selective violence, but this accounted for only half of the killings in the author’s own study of Greece. Indiscriminate violence may be less theoretically tractable, but it surely deserves greater attention. Kalyvas suggests that malicious denunciation is more prevalent where social ties are symmetric and dense; it is “the dark face of social capital.” This hypothesis is not tested, presumably because his empirical analysis is restricted to the countryside (two towns within the region were excluded for want of detailed data).

The overall achievement is exemplary in three respects. First, the book links micro and macro levels of analysis, revealing the importance of individual grievances and local rivalries that, when aligned with broader political and military forces, can lead to terrible violence. The micro is not just the macro writ small; it is qualitatively different. Second, the book demonstrates the utility of formal theory, where deduction proceeds from empirical knowledge rather than abstract reflection. The theory depends on rational choices, but it does not assume that actors have perfect information or make sophisticated calculations; theoretical insight stems from the interaction among different kinds of actors. Third, the book advertises the fruitfulness of disaggregated research, explaining small-scale variation (among villages) and rapid change (over months). This “microcomparison” combines rich qualitative evidence with systematic quantitative data, amplifying the probative value of each. It should be required reading on both sides of the methodological civil war within sociology.


Monica Prasad
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Federalism has been praised or blamed for outcomes ranging from incoherent government to the prevention of tyranny. But what causes federalism? Daniel Ziblatt attempts to answer this question by investigating why Germany adopted a federal framework at the moment of its unification while Italy adopted a unitary one.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, an extended detour away from the main question, examines the causes of differences in subnational support for national unification (according to Ziblatt, differences in degree of commercialization and state size explain patterns of regional support