

STATHIS N. KALYVAS

THE PARADOX OF TERRORISM IN CIVIL WAR

(Received 27 June 2003; accepted in revised form 22 July 2003)

ABSTRACT. A great deal of violence in civil wars is informed by the logic of terrorism: violence tends to be used by political actors against civilians in order to shape their political behavior. I focus on *indiscriminate violence* in the context of civil war: this is a type of violence that selects its victims on the basis of their membership in some group and irrespective of their individual actions. Extensive empirical evidence suggests that indiscriminate violence in civil war is informed by the logic of terrorism. I argue that under certain conditions, that tend to be quite common, such violence is counterproductive. I specify these conditions and address the following paradox: why do we sometimes observe instances of indiscriminate violence *even* under conditions that make this strategy counterproductive? I review four possible reasons: truncated data, ignorance, cost, and institutional constraints. I argue that indiscriminate violence emerges because it is much cheaper than its main alternative – selective violence. It is more likely under a steep imbalance of power between the competing actors, and where and when resources and information are low; however, most political actors eventually switch to selective violence. Thus, given a balance of power between competing actors, indiscriminate violence is more likely at early rather than late stages of the conflict. Overall, the paper suggests that even extreme forms of violence are used strategically.

KEY WORDS: civil war, indiscriminate victimization, non-combatants, terrorism, violence

The logic of terrorism informs the use of violence in civil wars in a fundamental way: violence tends to be used by political actors to induce civilians into compliance. In this paper, I focus on *indiscriminate violence* in the context of civil war: this is a type of violence whereby the victims are selected on the basis of their membership in some group and irrespective of their individual actions. I argue that under certain (prevalent) conditions such violence turns out to be counterproductive. I specify these conditions and address the following paradox: why do we sometimes observe instances of indiscriminate violence *even* under conditions that make this strategy counterproductive?

I begin with an examination of the aims of violence in civil war. I then discuss the distinction between selective and indiscriminate violence and specify the conditions under which the latter is counterproductive. I then ask why indiscriminate violence takes place even under conditions that make it counterproductive. I review four arguments that account for why



The Journal of Ethics 8: 97–138, 2004.

© 2004 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands.

indiscriminate violence is being observed: it reflects truncated data, ignorance, cost, or institutional constraints. I argue that indiscriminate violence emerges because it is much cheaper than its alternatives. It is more likely under a steep imbalance of power between the two actors, and where and when resources and information are low; however, most actors eventually learn and switch to selective violence. Thus, given a balance of power between the two actors, indiscriminate violence is more likely at early rather than late stages of the conflict.

VIOLENCE IN CIVIL WAR

Political actors use violence to achieve multiple, overlapping or mutually contradictory, goals. Over twenty, mostly overlapping, uses have been catalogued, including the terrorization, intimidation, demoralization, polarization, and radicalization of the public, the building of group morale, the enforcement or disruption of control, the mobilization of forces and resources, the elimination of opposing forces, the punishment for cooperation with the enemy, the provocation of countermeasures and repression, and the advertisement of the movement.¹ Furthermore, war itself may generate violence that is completely independent from the intentions of the main actors, such as individual revenge and looting.

A first cut distinction is between two key aims of violence: extermination and compliance.² Sometimes violence is used to exterminate an entire group, rather than place it under control. When, however, the finality of violence is not exhausted in the mass killing of a group of people, violence becomes “instrumental to the attainment of some other goal”³ – namely the establishment of control through compliance. Although the methods used to achieve compliance and extermination may be similar, these objectives are fundamentally different, both in terms of content and implications. A way to distinguish between the two is to ask whether a political actor intends to govern the population it targets for violence; an empirical indicator of this intention is whether the targets of violence (as opposed to its

¹ Alex P. Schmid, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases, and Literature* (Amsterdam: SWIDOC, 1983), pp. 97–99; Andrew R. Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, 1965), p. 169.

² Jacques Sémelin, “Qu’est-ce qu’un crime de masse? Le cas de l’ex-Yougoslavie,” *Critique Internationale* 6 (2000), pp. 144–145; Eugene V. Walter, *Terror and Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 14.

³ Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon J. Hawkins, *Deterrence: The Legal Threat in Crime Control* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 139.

victims) have the option to surrender. In most civil wars, political actors promote amnesty programs to encourage insurgent defection and spare or even reward civilians who defect and collaborate with them – whereas in genocides, the surrender of victims does not prevent their murder but expedites it.⁴

Resorting to violence in the context of a civil war in order to achieve compliance is generally referred to as “*terrorism*.” Although this is different from the term’s everyday use, its underlying logic is not; it encompasses two analytically distinct, though often overlapping, functions: elimination and deterrence. The victim of violence may be targeted to eliminate a particular risk (e.g., information leaks) and, also, to deter others from engaging in similar behavior; in other words, victims and targets of violence are distinct.⁵ For example, if a coercer tortures a child in order to get her to reveal where somebody else can be found, the child is simultaneously a victim and a target. But if a coercer tortures a child in order to get her father to reveal somebody else’s whereabouts, of which the child knows nothing, then it is the father who is the target although it is the child who suffers the violence; it is the father who can comply, or refuse to comply, while the child can do neither.⁶ In practice, this type of violence, while primarily proactive in its goal to deter a particular action in the future, tends to be simultaneously retrospective in its intention to punish a similar action that has already taken place; the logic is that threats must be eliminated and actual examples are more edifying than hypothetical ones.⁷

This insight has a long pedigree. Seneca argued that “no one proceeds to shed human blood for its own sake, or at any rate only few do so.”⁸ Even a cursory reading of descriptions points to the predominance of instrumental violence in civil war contexts. Consider the following examples. A Zimbabwean peasant explained the murder of a government collaborator by guerrillas by saying that “they only wanted to show the [masses] they had the power to do anything and instill fear so that none would repeat

⁴ Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 21.

⁵ Walter, *Terror and Resistance*, p. 9.

⁶ Onora O’Neill, “Which Are the Offers You Can’t Refuse?,” in R. G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris (eds.), *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 172–173.

⁷ Walter argues that the administration of punishment and the process of terror often overlap because violent punishments do evoke fear and are often justified by their putative deterrent value (see Walter, *Terror and Resistance*, p. 23).

⁸ Quoted in Hugo Grotius, “On the Law of War and Peace II” 22:2, in *De jure belli ac pacis*, trans. Francis W. Kelsey, with the collaboration of Arthur E. R. Boak, Henry A. Sanders, Jesse S. Reeves and Herbert F. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925).

the mistake.”⁹ In the Mozambique, “mutilated bodies were often displayed in public to act as a deterrent,”¹⁰ while in Peru “from the beginning, even without an infrastructure of war weaponry, Shining Path sought to terrorize and paralyze opposition, to inspire fear by displaying overwhelming force that demolished the enemy.”¹¹ Likewise the Vietcong used terrorism to instill fear. In a hamlet they would pick out a couple of people who they said cooperated with the United States, and shoot them, to set an example. Apparently, this worked.¹²

Seen from this angle, violence is primarily a resource rather than the final product;¹³ it is intended to shape the behavior of a targeted audience by altering the expected value of particular actions. In an emphatic formulation: “One of the most obvious and blatant benefits of atrocity is that it quite simply scares the hell out of people. The raw horror and savagery of those who murder and abuse cause people to flee, hide, and defend themselves feebly, and often their victims respond with mute passivity.”¹⁴ This goal is openly stated by both perpetrators and victims. A Nicaraguan liberal writing in 1928 about the violence of the conservatives pointed out: “All of the above delinquencies have been committed by conservative bandits, and per the general opinion to put fear into the Liberals.” Schroeder concludes: “*Para infundir terror* – “to put fear into:” this was the fundamental objective of all political groups.”¹⁵ Instances of harrowing and seemingly absurd violence typically entail such calculations. Paul Richards, an anthropologist who studied the civil war in Sierra Leone, argues that this analysis makes sense of “patterns of otherwise apparently senseless violence by the RUF.”¹⁶ It is not surprising, then, that people

⁹ Norma Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 156.

¹⁰ Shaun Vincent, “The Mozambique Conflict (1980–1992),” in Michael Cranna (ed.), *The True Cost of Conflict* (New York: The New Press, 1994), p. 87.

¹¹ Ponciano Del Pino H., “Family, Culture, and ‘Revolution’: Everyday Life with *Sendero Luminoso*,” in Steve J. Stern (ed.), *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 168.

¹² Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 135.

¹³ Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 2.

¹⁴ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995), p. 207.

¹⁵ Michael J. Schroeder, “‘To Induce a Sense of Terror’: Caudillio Politics and Political Violence in Northern Nicaragua, 1926–34 and 1981–95,” in Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner (eds.), *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 38.

¹⁶ Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), p. 181.

often describe civil wars as times of fear and eras of terror.¹⁷ Yet terror is not synonymous with mass violence. In fact, successful terror implies low levels of violence (in game theoretic terms, violence is “off the equilibrium path”). In this sense, violence is important only because it produces results.¹⁸ Coercion fails if it merely destroys the subject whose compliance is sought.

This deterrent dimension is implied by the highly suggestive ways of killing that sometimes border on the baroque. During the Vietnam War, death squads assassinated selected Vietcong cadres inside their houses and left on their bodies a piece of paper printed with a grotesque human eye; these paper eyes which had been printed by the U.S. Information Service in Saigon, turned up not only on corpses but as warnings on the doors of houses suspected of occasionally harboring Vietcong agents, thus inducing terror in the population.¹⁹ Likewise mutilation becomes a “walking example,” while the “burning of houses and cutting off of villagers’ hands and fingers inscribe, on the landscape and in the bodies of village people, a set of political messages rather more firmly than if they had been spoken over the radio.”²⁰

VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

It is possible to distinguish between two basic types of terrorism in civil war. Political actors may target their victims selectively or indiscriminately. Violence is *selective* or *discriminant* when individuals are targeted based on personalized information about their actions; it is *indiscriminate* when individuals are targeted solely on the basis of their membership in a group perceived to be connected with the opposition and irrespective of their individual actions (groups may be based on ties of kinship, location, class, ethnicity, etc.). In indiscriminate violence, individual guilt may be completely irrelevant. As the German command in occupied Greece put it: “If such people as are guilty cannot be found, those persons must be resorted to, who, without being connected with the actual deed, never-

¹⁷ Jagath P. Senaratne, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977–1990: Riots, Insurrections, Counterinsurgencies, Foreign Intervention* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1997), p. 145.

¹⁸ O’Neill, “Which Are the Offers You Can’t Refuse?,” pp. 171–172.

¹⁹ Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*, p. 184.

²⁰ Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, and Resources in Sierra Leone*, p. 6; Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: Markham, 1970), p. 106.

theless are to be regarded as corresponsable.”²¹ Indiscriminate violence is often described by the legal term “*reprisals*.”²² Both selective and indiscriminate violence are instrumental forms of violence aiming to generate compliance via deterrence.

It is well known that a key determinant of compliance is the perceived probability of being sanctioned.²³ In its simplest formulation, the theory of deterrence posits that threats can reduce the likelihood that certain actions will be undertaken. Cesare Beccaria pointed out that “the political intent of punishments is to instill fear in other men,” while Jeremy Bentham defined deterrence in terms of the “intimidation or terror of the law.”²⁴ In a well-known formulation, deterrence by punishment is a “method of retrospective inference” via “threats that, whenever a wrong has been actually committed, the wrongdoer shall incur punishment.”²⁵ To Bentham we owe the main hypothesis of what is known as the simple theory of deterrence: “The profit of the crime is the force which urges a man to delinquency: the pain of the punishment is the force employed to restrain him from it. If the first of these forces be the greater the crime will be committed; if the second, the crime will not be committed.”²⁶

Yet we know that many crimes are committed despite the known presence of threats. For example, Jack Katz shows that a substantial number of homicides are committed by people who are indifferent to sanctions.²⁷ Bentham’s account of deterrence has also been criticized as “mechanical” and based “upon false psychology;” it is argued instead, that threats may sometimes generate a desire of noncompliance and that criminal phenomena are completely independent of penal laws. At the same time, it is widely recognized that most people refrain from crime to avoid sanctions; deterrence is not perfect but can be achieved: “It appears that the introduction of a threat as a barrier to committing a particular behavior is

²¹ Quoted in D. M. Condit, *Case Study in Guerrilla War: Greece during World War II* (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1961), pp. 265–266.

²² Ingrid Detter De Lupis, *The Law of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 255.

²³ Michael Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 162.

²⁴ Zimring and Hawkins, *Deterrence: The Legal Threat in Crime Control*, p. 75.

²⁵ C. S. Kenny, *Outlines of Criminal Law, Based on Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge*, 13th edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p. 30.

²⁶ Quoted in Zimring and Hawkins, *Deterrence: The Legal Threat in Crime Control*, p. 75.

²⁷ Jack Katz, *Seductions of Crime: A Chilling Exploration of the Criminal Mind – from Juvenile Delinquency to Cold-Blooded Murder* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 12–51.

likely to cause members of a threatened audience to revise attitudes toward the desirability of the behavior.”²⁸

Indiscriminate violence is the product of an unwillingness or failure to discriminate, usually caused by lack of information. The most extreme form of indiscriminate violence is probably that which selects its victims on the basis of membership in a nation; it is often described as *random* violence and its archetypal example is a strain of Nazi terror in parts of occupied Europe. “On more than one occasion in the town of Athens,” writes McNeill, “a German patrol was sent out to the scene of the death of a German soldier, and there they arrested the first fifty persons who happened to walk down the street, lined them up against a wall and shot them out of hand.”²⁹ German terror in Warsaw during the same period is starkly described by Czeslaw Milosz:

Once, in the first year of the War, we were returning from a visit to a mutual friend who lived in the country. As I remember, we were arguing about the choice of a train. We decided against the advice of our host to take a train leaving half an hour later. We arrived in Warsaw and walked along the streets feeling very satisfied with life. It was a beautiful summer morning. We did not know that this day was to be remembered as one of the blackest in the history of our city. Scarcely had I closed the door behind me when I heard shrieks in the street. Looking out the window, I saw that a general man-hunt was on. This was the first man-hunt for Auschwitz. Later millions of Europeans were to be killed there, but at the time this concentration camp was just starting to operate. From the first huge transport of people caught on the streets that day no one, it appears, escaped alive. Alpha and I had strolled those streets five minutes before the beginning of the hunt; perhaps his umbrella and his insouciance brought us luck.³⁰

Because such threats are completely unpredictable they produce, initially at least, a paralyzing, turbulent, and irrational fear, scarcely permitting any thought, leading to the atomization of society.³¹ In rural Guatemala, where random violence was used extensively, fear destabilized social relations “by driving a wedge of distrust between members of families, between neighbors, among friends. Fear divide[d] communities through suspicion and apprehension, not only of strangers, but of each other.”³² A group of psychiatrists reported the results of a remarkable study on the effects of

²⁸ Zimring and Hawkins, *Deterrence: The Legal Threat in Crime Control*, p. 95.

²⁹ William H. McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma: War and Aftermath* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1947), p. 57.

³⁰ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 90.

³¹ Walter, *Terror and Resistance*, pp. 25–26; Thomas P. Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,” in Harry Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War: Problems and Approaches* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 81.

³² Linda Green, “Living in a State of Fear,” in Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (eds.), *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 105.

German terror on the population of Athens; they found that most people were paralyzed by the daily expectation of an “unpredictable and unknown misfortune” and the “incredible anxiety in front of the unknown which afflicted every individual fate.”³³ As long as the victims have no way to react against such violence, its effect is “to increase compliance with authority among those who feel they may be threatened.”³⁴ In other words, the population may be pushed into total passivity and political abdication.

Although random violence may work for a dictator,³⁵ it is less likely to achieve its aims under conditions of divided sovereignty where the presence of a rival makes defection possible. First, random violence defeats deterrence because it destroys the possibility of anticipation of a forthcoming evil and, hence, the ability to avoid it; it erases the relationship between crime and punishment, thus abolishing the concept of transgression. Its sheer unpredictability makes everyone fear lethal sanctions regardless of their behavior: innocence is irrelevant and compliance is utterly impossible. A German report described the attitude of the average citizen in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union as follows: “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.”³⁶ Under such conditions, “abstention ceases to seem a protection. Recruitment of insurgents goes up as risks of passivity and insurgency begin to equalize.”³⁷ Indeed, in Poland (and elsewhere), Nazi terror “left the Poles no other alternative but to *ignore* the occupier – either actively, by opposing him, or passively, by behaving as if he did not exist.”³⁸ Jan T. Gross elaborates this point:

One would expect that noncompliance with German demands carried such drastic penalties that scarcely anyone would dare to defy them. But full compliance was impossible; terror continued and even intensified with time. The population quickly recognized the new logic of the situation: whether one tried to meet German demands or not, one was

³³ F. Skouras, A. Hadjidimos, A. Kaloutsis and G. Papadimitriou, *I psychopathologia tis pinas, tou fovou kai tou agxous: nevroseis kai psychonevroseis* [The Psychopathology of Hunger, Fear, and Anxiety: Neuroses and Psychoneuroses] (Athens, 1947), pp. 124–136.

³⁴ Lynn T. White III, *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China’s Cultural Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 328.

³⁵ Mary McAuley, *Soviet Politics, 1917–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 50; Barrington Moore, *Terror and Progress: USSR* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 169–170.

³⁶ Matthew Cooper, *The Nazi War against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), p. 27.

³⁷ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966), p. 170.

³⁸ Jan T. Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 238.

equally exposed to violence. . . . It makes no sense, in the context of random punishment, to style one's life according to the possibility of being victimized, any more than it makes sense to orient all of one's everyday acts to the possibility of an accident.³⁹

Second, while compliance guarantees no security, collaboration with the opposition may actually increase one's chances of survival, while also allowing a sense of normative integrity.⁴⁰ In Poland, membership in the resistance made people more prudent and erased the false sense of security that was often fatal to those not involved in it; "conspirators" actively avoided capture by the Germans, while non-conspirators were much less careful in avoiding accidental contacts with the occupiers because they often felt that should they be arrested, they would spend a few days in detention and later, once their innocence established, they would be released. However, as there was little relationship between crime and punishment, this assumption was fatal. Conspirators very often had much better identification papers than non-conspirators and, if apprehended, they had already prepared satisfactory answers to most typical questions the police would ask. When they were caught in a round-up, someone in the network would try to get them out of prison in time; their families would be given money to bribe the appropriate officials; when threatened with arrest, blackmail, or denunciation, conspirators had vast organizational resources at their disposal: the organization would help them to disappear, find them a new place to live, give them new employment, new documents, etc.⁴¹ It is, therefore, possible to tentatively formulate the following proposition: *Indiscriminate violence is counterproductive in civil war.*

In contrast to indiscriminate violence, selective violence personalizes threats and endows them with credibility, for if people are targeted on the basis of their actions, then refraining from such actions guarantees safety. A British counterinsurgent compared indiscriminate violence to "trying to catch fish in a weedy pond by splashing about with a rather wide-meshed net as opposed to adopting the tactics of the pike, and lurking quietly in the weeds ready to snatch unsuspecting fish as they swim by."⁴² Practitioners and observers agree that selective violence is the most efficient way to deter defection.⁴³ In Robert Thompson's formulation: "Terror is more effective

³⁹ Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation*, p. 212.

⁴⁰ Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation*, p. 202.

⁴¹ Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation*, pp. 234–235.

⁴² Julian Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Operations: Techniques of Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967), p. 110.

⁴³ The only dissenting opinion seems to be Thornton's; however, I cannot follow his line of thought (see Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," p. 81).

when selective.”⁴⁴ As a U.S. colonel in Vietnam put it: “You really have to use a surgeon’s scalpel,”⁴⁵ while Ernesto Che Guevara recommended that “assaults and terrorism in indiscriminate form should not be employed.”⁴⁶ Note that, contrary to a widespread perception, selective terror can be, and is often, massive in scale. The Vietcong are estimated to have selectively assassinated as many as 50,000 people in a decade and a half.⁴⁷

Information that makes possible the distinction between indiscriminate and selective violence at the aggregate level is generally not available. As a result it is impossible to compare each type’s contribution to the overall fatalities of a civil war. In addition, observers (especially human rights organizations) have a tendency to designate as indiscriminate all kinds of extrajudicial killing, including selective violence. For example, Joseba Zulaika writes of the “indiscriminate killings of chivatos (informers) and civil guards carried out by ETA.”⁴⁸ Eric Carlton even builds randomness into his definition of “massacre.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, selective violence is much less visible compared to indiscriminate violence because of its “piecemeal” character. Careful micro-oriented research often finds that selective violence is much more important than generally believed. For instance, Truman Anderson found that in the area of Ukraine he studied, the killings by the Germans of persons “denounced as partisans by their fellow villagers” cumulatively rivaled two major massacres in that area.⁵⁰ Scott Wilson reports that more people were killed by Colombian rightist paramilitaries around the town of Dabeiba in a non-visible, individualized way than were killed in visible massacres.⁵¹

Likewise, it appears that the most extreme forms of indiscriminate violence are rather exceptional. More typical seem to be instances where victims are selected on the basis of location. For example, an important

⁴⁴ Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 25.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, p. 238.

⁴⁶ Ernesto Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 91.

⁴⁷ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, “Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1956–1970,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990), p. 215.

⁴⁸ Joseba Zulaika, *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1988), p. 85.

⁴⁹ Eric Carlton, *Massacres: An Historical Perspective* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1994), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Truman Anderson, “Incident at Baranivka: German Reprisals and the Soviet Partisan Movement in Ukraine, October–December 1941,” *The Journal of Modern History* 71 (1999), p. 621.

⁵¹ Scott Wilson, “Fewer Massacres in Colombia, But More Deaths,” *Washington Post* (24 June 2002), p. A15.

part of the German mass violence that took place in Athens, Greece, during the summer of 1944 seemed completely random, but turned out to have targeted specific neighborhoods suspected of communist sympathies. Likewise the 1997 massacres in Algeria were actually quite targeted; as a careful observer remarked: “Massacres are not blind. They are planned and target specific families. They bypass other families.”⁵² The violence unleashed by the Guatemalan regime in the early 1980s discriminated on the basis of villages. It is reported that “one of the notable features of the military campaign known as ‘scorched earth’ is that neighboring villages fared quite differently: one might be destroyed while another was left untouched, depending on the army’s perceived understanding of guerrilla support.”⁵³ Likewise Shelton H. Davis comments that Guatemalan villages that were located in areas of high guerrilla activity but “did not have a reputation of being held by guerrillas” were not attacked by the army.⁵⁴ When the Serb forces attacked the village of Bukos in Kosovo and “caused the Albanian villagers to flee,” they did not touch the neighboring village of Novo Selo, probably “because there were no Kosovo Liberation Army guerrillas in the village, residents said.”⁵⁵ A *New York Times* article on the war in Chechnya argued that “in the hands of Russia’s generals, military force is a blunt and often indiscriminate weapon” and went on to document the wholesale destruction of the Chechen village of Primykaniye. Yet, a careful reading of the same article suggests that the violence was after all not random: some villages stood “untouched, a reward, Russian officials say, to those who refused to aid the rebels and cooperated with the Russian army.” In fact, the Russians destroyed the Chechen village of Primykaniye, but spared the neighboring village of Tsentora-Yurt.⁵⁶ Jaqath Senaratne’s point about the violence in Sri Lanka is widely applicable: “The confused, unstable, and dangerous situation led many to believe that the violence was random and meaningless. The imputations of randomness by some observers (mainly journalists) was a result of the inability to see the many different strands of the violence . . . [and] to disaggregate ‘the violence’ into its components.”⁵⁷

⁵² Thierry Leclère, “Cinq questions sur les massacres en Algérie,” *Télérama* 21 (1998), pp. 6–7; Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” *Rationality and Society* 11 (1999), pp. 243–285.

⁵³ Green, “Living in a State of Fear,” p. 114.

⁵⁴ Shelton H. Davis, “Introduction: Sowing the Seeds of Violence,” in Robert M. Carmack (ed.), *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), p. 25.

⁵⁵ *The New York Times* (15 March 1999), p. A6.

⁵⁶ *The New York Times* (8 December 1999), p. A1.

⁵⁷ Senaratne, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977–1990*, p. 146.

Indiscriminate violence tends to be empirically associated with incumbents rather than insurgents.⁵⁸ Incumbent indiscriminate violence usually takes place in the context of military operations known as “mopping-up,” “comb,” “cordon and search,” “search and destroy” or “scorched earth” campaigns that seek to encircle and liquidate insurgents and undercut its civilian basis. These campaigns are often dubbed “pacification” campaigns;⁵⁹ euphemisms are common: “Three All policy” (for “Take All, Burn All, and Kill All”) (Japan in China); “Operation Clean-up” and “Operation Purification by Elimination” (Japan in Southeast Asia); “Campaign of Encirclement and Annihilation” and “Operation Extinction” (Indonesia in East Timor); “Operation Cinders” (Guatemala). Why are incumbents more likely to resort to indiscriminate violence?

The propensity of incumbents to use indiscriminate violence is related to an informational asymmetry between incumbents and insurgents. “While the party had a thousand eyes and a thousand ears,” Carlos Degregori observes about the Peruvian *Sendero Luminoso*, “the Armed Forces were blind or, rather, color-blind. They saw only black and white. Recent arrivals in the region, they tried to reproduce in the Andes the same repressive strategies that had proved successful in the Southern Cone. They did not perceive nuances; when they saw dark skin, they fired.”⁶⁰ As the Dutch discovered when they sent highly trained commando troops to Indonesia in the 1940s, “though skilled at killing, the commandos lacked the local knowledge and intelligence sources to act effectively against the guerrillas.”⁶¹ When the U.S. Marines arrived in the province

⁵⁸ Surveys conducted in Vietnam found that refugees who moved away from their homes because of (indiscriminate) bombardment and ground military operations tended to associate these actions with the incumbent regime, while refugees who moved because of (selective) terror and coercion tended to associate them with the insurgents. See Louis A. Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors: Displaced Persons and Other War Victims in Vietnam, 1954–1975* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 111. See also Jonathan Spencer, “On Not Becoming a ‘Terrorist’: Problems of Memory, Agency, and Community in the Sri Lankan Conflict,” in Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele and Pamela Reynolds (eds.), *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 131; Thomas H. Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Mozambique’s War of Independence, 1964–1974* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 118.

⁵⁹ Unaware of its own irony, a U.S. report in Vietnam pointed out that “areas cannot be pacified if there are no people living in them” (quoted in Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, p. 113).

⁶⁰ Carlos Iván Degregori, “Harvesting Storms: Peasant Rondas and the Defeat of *Sendero Luminoso* in Ayacucho,” in Steve J. Stern (ed.), *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 143–144.

⁶¹ Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People’s Militia and the Indonesian Revolution, 1945–1949* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), p. 151.

of Segovia, in Nicaragua, in 1927, they “had no practical way to distinguish between rebel sympathizers, supporters, and soldiers and “peaceful civilians.” Facing these uncertainties, they opted to wage a brutally violent offensive against Segovian campesinos generally.”⁶² As a U.S. officer stationed in the Philippines in the beginning of the 20th century pointed out, “we do not know insurrectos and bad men from good ones, so we are often compelled to arrest all alike.”⁶³ A Filipino captured this problem when he described the U.S. Army as a “blind giant,” powerful enough to destroy the enemy, but unable to find him.⁶⁴ Likewise an observer noted that in Indochina, “the French destroy at random because they don’t have the necessary information”⁶⁵ and a U.S. report pointed out that “the guerrillas have a more effective intelligence system than their opponents.”⁶⁶

This informational asymmetry is largely the result of the fact that insurgents are almost always the first movers; having eliminated the state’s presence in the areas they control, they are able to set-up a village-based administrative apparatus able to collect the kind of information that allows them to identify spies and non-collaborators: insurgents, “unlike the army, tend to establish a more or less permanent presence in an area and will have the information necessary to sort out actual ‘offenders’ (informers and spies for the government) from the faceless peasant. Thus a peasant informer to the government is more likely to be found out than one who collaborates with the guerrillas.”⁶⁷

That discrimination emerges principally from the availability of information rather than from feelings of sympathy is indicated by the fact that insurgents do not always shy from indiscriminate violence.⁶⁸ Consistent

⁶² Schroeder, “‘To Induce a Sense of Terror’: Caudillo Politics and Political Violence in Northern Nicaragua, 1926–34 and 1981–95,” p. 39.

⁶³ Brian McAllister Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 139.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902*, p. 160.

⁶⁵ Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, p. 109.

⁶⁶ Fred H. Barton, *Salient Operational Aspects of Paramilitary Warfare in Three Asian Areas* (ORO-T-228. Chevy Chase: Operations Research Office, 1953), p. 138.

⁶⁷ Wickham-Crowley, “Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1956–1970,” pp. 216–217.

⁶⁸ Scott Peterson, *Me against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda: A Journalistic Report from the Battlefields of Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 220; Del Pino, “Family, Culture, and ‘Revolution’: Everyday Life with Sendero Luminoso,” pp. 163–164, 172; Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, and Resources in Sierra Leone*, p. 181; Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, pp. 58, 123; Michael Fellman,

with the insight that indiscriminate violence is used when local information is unavailable, insurgents use it mostly against villages that openly support the incumbents by setting a militia, in areas where their presence is limited (such as urban centers), and after their administrative apparatus has been destroyed, as in Algeria in 1997.⁶⁹ For example, the success of the British resettlement program in Malaya, in 1951, caused the insurgents to respond with indiscriminate violence: “Incidents and casualties reached their peak. The “disloyal” villages were raked with machine-gun fire from the jungle-covered hills; night raiders penetrated the village fences to murder collaborators, resettlement officers, and village policemen.”⁷⁰ Likewise, the Peruvian Shining Path increased its armed attacks in 1989, not only against communities organized into militias, but also against neutral civilian populations that lacked direct connection with the political forces in conflict.⁷¹

HOW INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE IS SUPPOSED TO WORK

Contrary to conventional wisdom, indiscriminate violence is generally not gratuitous, wanton, or solely bent on revenge; rather, it is primarily deterrent.⁷² It aims to deter people from collaborating with the rival actor by targeting those assumed to be somehow connected with it. In other words, the targets of the violence will be the population at large and possibly the rival political actor who may have ties to the victims.⁷³

Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 25; F. J. West, Jr., *The Village* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 272; Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983), p. 65; Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Operation*, pp. 93–94; Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, pp. 25–27.

⁶⁹ Kalyvas, “Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria.”

⁷⁰ Richard L. Clutterbuck, *The Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 63.

⁷¹ Del Pino, “Family, Culture, and ‘Revolution’: Everyday Life with *Sendero Luminoso*,” p. 189.

⁷² In secessionist wars, ethnic insurgents may use indiscriminate violence in the initial stages of the conflict against ethnic others so as to drive them off the territory they seek to control (e.g., Senaratne, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977–1990*, p. 88). Here the goal of violence is not civilian compliance. Once this goal is achieved, ethnic insurgents often turn to selective violence against their co-ethnics, especially if incumbents adopt strategies of cooptation.

⁷³ In Waldemar Lotnik’s account of the Polish–Ukrainian war in 1943–1944, massacres of villagers targeted primarily the rival group. A former Polish partisan, Lotnik recalls his officer’s talk on the eve of one of the first massacres: “Don’t burn, don’t loot. Just shoot

The goal is to shape behavior indirectly through association, to shift responsibility for hostile actions to a wider group of people. “Burn some farms and some big villages in the Morbihan and begin to make some examples,” wrote Napoleon Bonaparte to General Guillaume Brune who, as commander of the army of the West, was getting ready to quash the monarchist rebellion; “it is only by making war terrible,” he added, “that the inhabitants themselves will rally against the brigands and will finally feel that their apathy is extremely costly to them.”⁷⁴ The use of indiscriminate violence against Native American Nations by U.S. troops “raised the hope that severe enough punishment of the group, even though innocent suffered along with the guilty, might produce true group responsibility and end the menace to the frontiers.”⁷⁵ “Bring in all the disloyal citizens around about where Briggs was killed,” a Union commander in Middle Tennessee ordered during the U.S. Civil War: “they must be made to suffer for this Bushwhacking business.”⁷⁶ A similar point was made in Missouri:

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.⁷⁷

A March 1944 public announcement of the Germans in occupied Greece stated that sabotage actions would be punished with the execution by hanging of three residents of the closest village unless the perpetrators were arrested within 48 hours or it was proved instead that the villagers had actively discouraged sabotage actions. In so doing, this kind of violence provides a basic incentive for collaboration, namely the prevention of the threatened harm. The Germans’ announcement I just quoted went on to add: “Hence the duty of self-preservation of every Greek when learning about sabotage intentions is to warn immediately the closest military authority.”⁷⁸

young, able-bodied men. If anyone resists, make sure you shoot him before he shoots you. We have to teach them that they cannot take out selected Polish citizens and kill and torture them. We must teach them that they can’t get away with that” [see Waldemar Lotnik, *Nine Lives: Ethnic Conflict in the Polish–Ukrainian Borderlands* (London: Serif, 1999), p. 65].

⁷⁴ Quoted in Roger Dupuy, *Les chouans* (Paris: Hachette, 1997), pp. 158–159.

⁷⁵ Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), p. 43.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860–1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988), p. 156.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War*, p. 201.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Nikos I. Zervis, *I Germaniki katochi sti Messinia* [The German Occupation in Messinia] (Kalamata, 1998), p. 179.

In a nutshell, the logic of indiscriminate violence is as follows: If the “guilty” cannot be identified and arrested, then violence ought to target innocent people somehow associated with them. The underlying assumption is that the “innocent” will either force the “guilty” to alter their behavior or the “guilty” will change their course of action when they realize its impact upon the “innocent” – or both. In addition to spreading responsibility, indiscriminate violence also introduces an explicit calculus of comparative sanctions: the targeted population will collaborate with the incumbents because it fears their sanctions more than the rebels’. As a German Army order pointed out, “the population must be more frightened of our reprisals than of the partisans.”⁷⁹

THE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE EFFECTS OF INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE

Though appalling, indiscriminate violence is not lacking in logic. Yet few observations seem to enjoy wider currency than the perception that indiscriminate violence is at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive.⁸⁰ This is noted by perpetrators (both political and military leaders), civilian and insurgent targets, and outside observers – during and after civil wars. Writing about the Vendée war in 1797, Gracchus Babeuf observed that the violent measures of the Republicans against the Vendean insurgents “were used without discrimination and produced an effect that was completely opposite to what was expected.”⁸¹ “No measure is more self-defeating than collective punishments” argues a classic text of irregular war.⁸² Thomas Henriksen affirms that in “revolutionary warfare” “reprisals serve the rebels’ cause” and notes that in colonial Mozambique, “again and again, FRELIMO converts pointed to Portuguese acts as *the* prime factor for their decision. Non-Portuguese observers substantiated this assertion” (original emphasis).⁸³ James S. Coleman includes the precept “Do not engage in indiscriminate terror” among the four basic recommendations for action

⁷⁹ Otto Heilbrunn, *Partisan Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 150.

⁸⁰ E.g., George J. Andreopoulos, “The Age of National Liberation Movements,” in Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos and Mark R. Shulman (eds.), *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 196; O’Neill, “Which Are the Offers You Can’t Refuse?,” p. 80; Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*, p. 117.

⁸¹ Gracchus Babeuf, *La guerre de la vendée et le système de dépopulation*, eds. Reynald Secher and Jean-Joël Brégeon (Paris: Tallandier, 1987), p. 119.

⁸² Heilbrunn, *Partisan Warfare*, p. 152.

⁸³ Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Mozambique’s War of Independence, 1964–1974*, pp. 128–129.

that ought to guide both incumbents and insurgents.⁸⁴ Insurgents are aware of this mechanism: “The party was correct in its judgment that government doctrine . . . would drive additional segments of the population into opposition,” the Vietcong argued, “where they would have no alternative but to follow the Party’s leadership to obtain protection.”⁸⁵ Che Guevara went as far as to locate the mechanism that leads peasants to support rebels precisely in the indiscriminate behavior of incumbents,⁸⁶ a point echoed by arguments positing that “along with the organizational catalyst, what is required to convert normally risk-averse peasants into revolutionary soldiers is a high level of indiscriminately targeted repressive violence.”⁸⁷ In short, as Truman Anderson concludes, “the primary contribution” of indiscriminate violence to the prosecution of modern wars has been to actually aggravate insurgencies and leave lasting, bitter memories which time does not erase.⁸⁸ Hannah Arendt must have had indiscriminate violence in her mind when she remarked that “violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.”⁸⁹

Perhaps the most striking case for the counterproductive effects of indiscriminate violence is the oft-noted tendency of insurgents to actually welcome, or even provoke, incumbent reprisals so as to win recruits – by ambushing isolated enemy soldiers close to a village.⁹⁰

The most (in)famous case for the futility of indiscriminate violence is perhaps the Nazi reprisal policy in occupied Europe. This policy aimed to deter resistance against occupation. Reprisals appear to have been an utter and complete failure: resistance activity was simply not stifled. More importantly, they were counterproductive in that they actually induced

⁸⁴ James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1990), p. 501.

⁸⁵ Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, p. 172.

⁸⁶ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 139.

⁸⁷ T. David Mason and Dale A. Krane, “The Political Economy of Death Squads: Toward a Theory of the Impact of State-Sanctioned Terror,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989), p. 176.

⁸⁸ Truman Anderson, *The Conduct of Reprisals by the German Army of Occupation in the Southern USSR, 1941–1943*, Volume 1 (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1995), p. 43.

⁸⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), p. 56.

⁹⁰ Paul Aussaresses, *Services spéciaux. Algérie 1955–1957* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), p. 62; Senaratne, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977–1990*, p. 95; Carl Schmitt, *Théorie du partisan* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), p. 280. International sympathy caused by atrocities provides an additional benefit for insurgents.

people to join the resistance. Consider the following statement by a Greek villager:

[The Germans] destroyed everything with the expectation that they would eliminate the rebels, but in reality they achieved the opposite results. The more the Germans burned and destroyed the villages of the unfortunate Evritania [a region in central Greece] in order to fight communism, the more the inhabitants of the region were attracted by communism, which was unknown until then . . . It is beyond doubt that the Italians and the Germans consciously fought against communism but subconsciously worked for its success.⁹¹

“Whatever the purpose of the German policy of reprisals,” D. M. Condit confirms, “it did little to pacify Greece, fight communism, or control the population. In general, the result was just the opposite.⁹² Burning villages left many male inhabitants with little place to turn except guerrilla bands. Killing women, children, and old men fed the growing hatred of the Germans and the desire for vengeance.”⁹³ German observers in neighboring Yugoslavia “frankly concluded that rather than deterring resistance, reprisal policy was driving hitherto peaceful and politically indifferent Serbs into the arms of the partisans.”⁹⁴ Nazi reprisals produced a similar effect all over occupied Europe, as did Japanese reprisals in Asia.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Asimakis Giousas, *Aris Velouhiotis kai to matomeno Krikelo* [Aris Velouchiotis and bloody Krikelo] (Athens, 1972), p. 125.

⁹² Condit, *Case Study in Guerrilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 268.

⁹³ German field commanders in occupied Greece ended up realizing that indiscriminate killing did not work. For example, after some reprisal executions, a German announcement to the local population remarked that warnings “had been taken seriously only by a few of you” (Zervis, *I Germaniki katochi sti Messinia*, p. 149). According to historians of the German occupation in Greece, reprisals in Greece produced only locally limited aftereffects of intimidation.

⁹⁴ Christopher R. Browning, “Germans and Serbs: The Emergence of Nazi Antipartisan Policies in 1941,” in Michael Berenbaum (ed.), *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 68.

⁹⁵ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 179; Ben Shepherd, “Hawks, Doves and Tote Zonen: A Wehrmacht Security Division in Central Russia, 1943,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (2002), pp. 349–369; Lotnik, *Nine Lives: Ethnic Conflict in the Polish–Ukrainian Borderlands*, p. 87; Jonathan E. Gumz, “Wehrmacht Perceptions of Mass Violence in Croatia, 1941–1942,” *The Historical Journal* 44 (2001), pp. 1015–1038; Marco Minardi, “War in the Mountains: Community Ties and Civil War in Central Italy,” Presented in the Workshop on Civil Wars and Political Violence in 20th Century Europe (European University Institute, Florence 18–20 April 2002), p. 8; H. R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France 1942–1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 190; Lincoln Li, *The Japanese Army in North China, 1937–1941: Problems of Political and Economic Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 209–210 and 231; Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 68; Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict*

The counterproductive effect of indiscriminate violence holds beyond the excessive levels of Nazi and Japanese violence in World War II. Consider the following examples from places as different from each other as Guatemala, Vietnam, and Venezuela:

Immediately after the Guatemalan army killed about 50 people, including women and children, in the village of La Estancia, forty young men and women left the village to join the guerrillas.⁹⁶

“Every time the Army came they made more friends for the V.C.” a Vietnamese peasant told Trullinger about South Vietnamese army raids in his village.⁹⁷

A Venezuelan guerrilla suggested that there was probably a new recruit for every woman raped by government soldiers.⁹⁸

Yet why and how indiscriminate violence is counterproductive remains unspecified. I specify and examine five mechanisms: indiscriminate violence fails because it produces emotional reactions, an ambiguous structure of incentives, reverse discrimination, selective incentives for the rivals, and overestimates the strength of ties between political actors and civilians.

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Niccoló Machiavelli pointed out that punishment “should be used with moderation, so as to avoid cause for hatred; for no ruler benefits by making himself odious.”⁹⁹ Because indiscriminate violence targets people independently of what they both did or could have done, it is perceived as deeply unfair. Unfair and immoderate punishment may trigger an intense emotional reaction (ranging from “ill will” to “moral outrage,” “alienation,” and “visceral anger”), making people more risk-seeking and hence more likely to play an active role in the rebellion under a previously unacceptable risk.

during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1946; Shelby Tucker, *Among the Insurgents: Walking through Burma* (London: Flamingo, 2001); Stuart A. Herrington, *Stalking the Vietcong: Inside Operation Phoenix: A Personal Account* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1997), p. 21.

⁹⁶ Robert M. Carmack, “The Story of Santa Cruz Quiché,” in Robert M. Carmack (ed.), *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 54–55.

⁹⁷ James W. Trullinger, *Village at War: An Account of Conflict in Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 85.

⁹⁸ Wickham-Crowley, “Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1956–1970,” p. 234. For similar observations see Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (in progress).

⁹⁹ Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 19.

That resentment and anger result from indiscriminate violence is well documented.¹⁰⁰ A Guatemalan peasant told Kay Warren how indiscriminate violence could turn fear into anger: “This was so heavy, so heavy. You were disturbed, you wanted to have some way of defending yourself. The feeling emerged – it wasn’t fear but anger. Why do they come persecuting if one is free of faults, if one works honorably? You felt bad, well we all did. Grief but also anger.”¹⁰¹ That, in turn, anger may trigger high-risk behavior was a point made by one of the earliest theorists of irregular war who noted that civilians normally would not take up arms against regular troops: it was difficult to imagine, for instance, the merchants of Paris, France constituting themselves into a fighting force. But this situation might suddenly change if the house of a civilian was destroyed and his wife or children killed.¹⁰² A man who was captured by an American loyalist band in North Carolina, noted in 1781 that the band

consisted of persons who complained of the greatest cruelties, either to their persons or property. Some had been unlawfully Drafted, Others had been whipped and ill-treated, without trial; Others had their houses burned, and all their property plundered and Barbarous and cruel Murders had been committed in their Neighborhoods.¹⁰³

However, anger produces sustained action and mobilization only in the presence of an organization that catalyzes it.¹⁰⁴ The absence or weakness of such organizations leads to passivity or sloppy actions doomed to failure; no matter how outraged, civilians will have no choice but to collaborate with the indiscriminate actor. For example, armed leftist groups in Argentina consciously planned a terror campaign in order to create chaos and unleash indiscriminate violence by the army, in order to create massive dissatisfaction and launch a revolutionary process. They were right about the army’s terror, but were eliminated in the process; the Guatemalan rebels made a similar miscalculation.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, p. 366.

¹⁰¹ Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 109.

¹⁰² J. F. A. Le Mièrre de Corvey, quoted in Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), p. 113.

¹⁰³ Jeffrey J. Crow, “Liberty Men and Loyalists: Disorder and Disaffection in the North Carolina Backcountry,” in Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate and Peter J. Albert (eds.), *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), p. 145.

¹⁰⁴ Wickham-Crowley, “Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1956–1970,” p. 235; Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p. 35.

AMBIGUOUS STRUCTURE OF INCENTIVES

Indiscriminate violence often fails to generate a clear structure of incentives for noncollaboration with the rebels and may even produce strong incentives for collaboration with them – thus generating defection instead of deterring it. Like (though less than) in random violence, compliance is almost as unsafe as noncompliance, as the “innocent” can do little to nothing to escape punishment and the “guilty” are equally (and some times less) threatened compared to the “innocent.” “The wanton nature of the retaliation – the picking of victims at random,” Condit argues “meant that pro-German Greeks or their relatives suffered as much as anti-German Greeks.¹⁰⁵ Under these circumstances there was little advantage in being a collaborator [of the Germans]. . . . As the numbers of the homeless and dead grew, the Greek population became simultaneously more terror stricken and more anti-German.” Indeed, German reprisals during anti-guerrilla campaigns in the Soviet Union often victimized pro-German *starostas* (elders).¹⁰⁶ In Kenya, it had become so dangerous not to admit having taken the Mau Mau oath “that a denial of having taken the oath was often replied [by the United Kingdom troops] by a bullet or a club on the head.”¹⁰⁷ Consider the following examples from occupied Italy and Vietnam:

[A Fascist from Neviano Arduini, province of Parma] was waiting for [the Germans] on the front door. He was a Fascist, so he welcomed them, when he saw them. They ordered him to show his documents, he got in and came out with his identity card in one hand. He was hardly out, that he was shot in the head and killed. Just so, in front of his children. Then they ordered his wife to cook some eggs and ate them, right there, with the corpse lying on the ground.¹⁰⁸

A South Vietnamese captain observed: “The Americans are destroying everything. . . . They bomb the rich and the poor. The rich man is the V.C.’s enemy. We should protect him. But now he has two enemies: the V.C., and the Americans who bomb all the houses. They even bomb the houses of the local militia.”¹⁰⁹ Moyer found that “allied military operations damaged informant and agent operations. The Allies inevitably killed some informants and agents, just as they killed innocent civilians and VC.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Condit, *Case Study in Guerrilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 268.

¹⁰⁶ John A. Armstrong, “Introduction,” in John A. Armstrong (ed.), *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Donald Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya’s Peasant Revolt* (Letchworth: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), p. 130.

¹⁰⁸ Minardi, “War in the Mountains: Community Ties and Civil War in Central Italy,” p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, p. 115.

¹¹⁰ Mark Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA’s Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), p. 69.

Furthermore, indiscriminate violence lacks almost every feature generally considered to be necessary for the effectiveness of sanctions: it is usually late,¹¹¹ often arbitrary, and totally disproportionate. As a Vietnamese informant told Jeffrey Race: "One decisive difference between the two sides which put the government at a disadvantage was that the opposition would use terror, at any time and place of its own choosing, while the government could not."¹¹² Furthermore, indiscriminate violence tends to be inconsistent and erratic. H. R. Kedward points out that in occupied France "there was no consistency in the German response to acts of armed Resistance which allows a meaningful correlation between different kinds of maquis action and the incidence of reprisals."¹¹³ Yet, compliance is more easily observed when people are required to meet highly specific obligations rather than nonspecific ones;¹¹⁴ unintelligible and unpredictable violence may arouse unfavorable reaction, well beyond the actual level of violence.¹¹⁵ Inconsistency is shocking, confusing, and may signal weakness; it makes one suspect a campaign aimed at mere annihilation, in the face of which chances of survival may seem enhanced through resistance. Indeed, it is argued that consistency is essential; whether in accommodation or dissent, it deters dissent.¹¹⁶

These problems are, in large part, a consequence of the fact that indiscriminate violence is often not followed by the establishment of control. Indeed, the logic of indiscriminate violence requires that its potential victims can prevent its recurrence by denouncing hostile acts planned by the insurgents about which they are privy. Besides the assumption of information, this can only work if civilians obtain credible protection from the incumbents, otherwise they will be exposed to insurgent counter-violence; in turn, this requires the establishment of incumbent control.

¹¹¹ E.g., Giovanni Contini, *La memoria divisa* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1997).

¹¹² Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, p. 134.

¹¹³ Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942–1944*, p. 181.

¹¹⁴ Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*, p. 151.

¹¹⁵ Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, p. 109.

¹¹⁶ Mark Irving Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31 (1987), p. 287. Capriciousness may be useful, argue Leites and Wolf, but it should be used consistently and sparingly (Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, p. 99). A counterpoint is made by De Swaan who argues that totalitarian regimes never exactly specify a detailed schedule of compliance [Abram De Swaan, "Terror as Government Service," in M. Hoefnagels (ed.), *Repression and Repressive Violence* (Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger, 1977)].

Often, however, incumbents raid an area, kill civilians in reprisal actions, and depart. Insurgents who usually escape unhurt are quick to return;¹¹⁷ they either capitalize on the people's discontent or force them to collaborate with them by threatening their own violence.¹¹⁸ In 1941, a German officer serving in the Ukraine reasoned: "Were the troops simply to shoot a number of uninvolved residents by way of a reprisal and then simply withdraw, the residents' interest in finding the bandits would be reduced if not completely extinguished, and the danger of further support for the bandits increased."¹¹⁹ In a report sent to his headquarters in April-May 1944, a German field commander in occupied Greece pointed out that the policy of reprisals had no noticeable effect because it did not entail the establishment of permanent control in the areas affected.¹²⁰ In 1971 Bangladesh, for instance, "a Razakar [pro-Pakistani volunteer] from Galimpur in Nawabganj Police Station had gone as a guide with an army column to sweep a rebel hideout. When he returned, he found his three sons killed and a daughter kidnapped."¹²¹ This is why counterinsurgency experts strongly recommend "clear-and-hold" instead of "search-and-clear" operations and warn that when there is no prospect of holding any area which may be cleared, no effort should be made to involve the inhabitants on the side of the government because "it is merely asking them to commit suicide."¹²²

REVERSE DISCRIMINATION

Indiscriminate violence often produces reverse discrimination against "non-rebels" and "anti-rebels," who, believing that their "innocence" will shield them, fail to protect themselves effectively. A man recalls in his memoirs how he learned, one day, that the Germans would arrest a number of people in his hometown, in Northern Greece. Having seen the names in the blacklist, he set out to warn these people that their life was in danger and they had better flee. One of them, a disillusioned former communist, refused: "I have severed my links to the party, I am not involved in anything right now, why should I flee?" He was arrested and was executed, whereas

¹¹⁷ Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, p. 128.

¹¹⁸ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 115.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Anderson, "Incident at Baranivka," p. 610.

¹²⁰ Zervis, *I Germaniki katochi sti Messinia*, p. 221.

¹²¹ Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 105.

¹²² Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, pp. 114–117.

the real communists ran away.¹²³ Likewise, a Greek villager recounts: “One evening the Germans raided our village and caught all the men they found at home. In fact, they found and caught precisely those men who were not associated with [the partisans] and had, thus, no reason to fear. They found and caught them because those who had made up their minds [and were associated with the partisans] used to leave the village at night and sleep outside.”¹²⁴ A U.S. Commander who served in the Dominican Republic summed up this problem in his report on concentration camps for the internment of civilians: “as a military measure the concentration was productive of no good results. The good males came in and the bad ones remained out, but were not found.”¹²⁵ The result of such actions ought to be obvious. As David Stoll puts it: “The army was so indiscriminate that I heard of cases where even close family members of EGP [rebels] targets fled to the guerrillas for protection, because they were far more selective in defining their enemy.”¹²⁶

SELECTIVE INCENTIVES FOR THE RIVALS

Indiscriminate violence allows insurgents to solve their collective action problem, by turning the protection of the civilian population into a selective incentive. In China during the Japanese occupation, the communists were able to teach peasants how to face Japanese raids following the *paofan* or “run for shelter under enemy attack” method. By inducing collective discipline and eliminating free-riding, they were able to turn peasants into a disciplined group; in turn, the peasants won safety, which they could not have achieved on their own.¹²⁷ Similar tactics have been used in many places—including such methods as in-site hiding through the building of underground community tunnels (Vietnam), bunkers (Lithuania), or foxholes and caves (Latin America).¹²⁸ Protection becomes a selective incentive for insurgents because its sheer existence is

¹²³ Michalis Papakonstantinou, *To chroniko tis megalis nichtas* [The Chronicle of the Long Night] (Athens: Estia, 1999), p. 313.

¹²⁴ Thanasis Svolos, *Andartis sta vouna tou moria. Odoiporiko (1947–49)* [Guerrilla in the Mountains of Morias: A Journey (1947–49)] (Athens, 1990), p. 22.

¹²⁵ Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during the U.S. Occupation of 1916–1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 154.

¹²⁶ David Stoll, *Between Two Armies: In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 120.

¹²⁷ Odoric Y. K. Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 231.

¹²⁸ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), p. 43.

due *only* to indiscriminate violence. In occupied France, Kedward points out, “when the acts of reprisals are added to the indiscriminate round-ups and the residue of Vichy collaborationism, the pressure on the population in a multitude of localities to look to the maquis as a place of refuge, or as a receptive and mobilizing organization, was high.”¹²⁹ Carlos Cabarrús summarizes this point by noting (about El Salvador) that when the war expands, the power of a revolutionary organization lies in its ability to provide security for its members.¹³⁰ As a former Muslim rebel in the Southern Philippines told Thomas M. McKenna: “I joined because of the violence created by the Ilaga [Christian fighters]; because there was no place safe during the trouble at that time.”¹³¹

As violence escalates, so does the value of protection. The ability to offer protection produces civilian support if only because survival-maximizing civilians will collaborate with the political actor who credibly offers them a way out – as opposed to the political actor that leaves them no option. Under such circumstances, participation in rebellion entails no collective action problem – in fact, non-participation does.¹³² What is more, the actor providing protection can decide whether to turn it into a public good available to all, or a selective incentive available only to particular individual or communities. The latter option makes indiscriminate violence extremely counterproductive: the decision by insurgents not to protect a village deemed unfriendly amounts to exposing it to the violence of incumbents: in other words, using one’s adversary to carry one’s own sanctions!

OVERESTIMATING THE STRENGTH OF TIES BETWEEN POLITICAL ACTORS AND CIVILIANS

Beyond inducing civilians to denounce hostile insurgent activities to incumbents, the logic of indiscriminate violence assumes that civilians are also able to lobby the insurgents. In turn, this is based on the assumption

¹²⁹ Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France 1942–1944*, p. 190.

¹³⁰ Carlos Rafael Cabarrús, *Génesis de una revolución: análisis del surgimiento y desarrollo de la organización campesina en El Salvador* [Genesis of a Revolution: Analysis of the Emergence and Development of the Peasant Organization in El Salvador] (Hidalgo: Ediciones de la Casa Chata, 1983), p. 195.

¹³¹ Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 183.

¹³² On this point, see Stoll, *Between Two Armies: In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, p. 20; and Davis, “Introduction: Sowing the Seeds of Violence,” p. 23.

that ties between civilians and insurgents are strong: civilians have access to and influence on insurgents and, conversely, insurgents care about civilians. This is a reasonable assumption since political actors depend on their civilian collaborators and wish not to alienate them.

There are a few cases whereby insurgents have reduced or even suspended their activities because of the damage imposed by massive indiscriminate violence on the population. The Norwegian resistance rejected aggressive tactics in 1943 as a result of German indiscriminate violence and justified its decision as follows: “We are convinced that [active assault on the enemy] will bring disasters to the people and the country which will be out of proportion to the military gains, and that it will disrupt and destroy the longer-term work of civil and military preparations which promise to be of the greatest importance to the nation.”¹³³ Likewise, there is evidence that insurgents sometimes suspend some of their activities locally because of the negative impact of indiscriminate violence – especially when they are weak.¹³⁴ In occupied Greece, British agents reported that reprisals had a negative impact on the popularity of guerrillas. When pressed to extend the struggle in the cities by initiating a total war, Greek partisans objected on the grounds that the expected reprisals would turn the population against them. Furthermore, in Greece, there are a few cases where civilians were able to successfully lobby the rebels into suspending their activity.¹³⁵ However, in almost all the cases examined, the insurgents disregarded such lobbying. When asked to release the hostages he was holding in order to save the town of Saint-Amand from German reprisals in the summer of 1944, the *maquisard* commander François replied: “I couldn’t care less about Saint-Amand, the men needed only to go off to the maquis, as we did ourselves.”¹³⁶ Not surprisingly then, civilians often blame the insurgents for incumbent massacres.¹³⁷ Blaming, however, and

¹³³ Quoted in Olav Riste and Berit Nökleby, *Norway 1940–1945* (Oslo: Johan Grundt Tanum Forlag, 1973), pp. 68–69. The same logic appears to have led the Cetnik guerrillas in occupied Yugoslavia to tone down their activity.

¹³⁴ E.g., Beppe Fenoglio, *La guerre sur les collines* [The War in the Hills] (Paris: Galimard, 1973), pp. 166–167.

¹³⁵ Roger Petersen recounts similar incidents in the Lithuanian village of Samogitia during the guerrilla war against the Soviet regime right after the end of WWII [Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 196–197; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*].

¹³⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *A French Tragedy: Scenes of Civil War, Summer 1944* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), p. 72.

¹³⁷ As one of the inhabitants of the Saint-Amand put it after the *maquisards* fled the town: “On June 7, the maquis ordered the rounds of drinks and, on June 8, it left us the job of paying the check” (Todorov, *A French Tragedy: Scenes of Civil War, Summer 1944*, pp. 42–43). For other cases of civilians blaming the rebels for having provoked incumbent reprisal violence, see Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

acting against the insurgents is not the same. Unless incumbents are able to protect them, civilians will generally not act against the insurgents no matter how much they blame or dislike them.

Generally, the full suspension of insurgent activities because of incumbent indiscriminate violence tends to be rare. Insurgents are usually aware of the risks they force on the civilian population from the outset and are generally unwilling to stop fighting because of them. Yet, the lack of local information leads incumbents to overestimate the strength of ties between incumbents and insurgents; this leads them to mistakenly assume that the targeted group is tightly linked to the rebels. Michael Fellman reports that (during the U.S. Civil War) “assuming all Missourians to be enemies, Kansas regiments believed it was their task to suppress them, to strip them of the means of resistance to Union authority as systematically as possible. . . . For them all Missourians were by nature traitors.”¹³⁸ Likewise, the attitude of new British recruits who arrived in Malaya to face the communist insurgency was described by a local journalist as meaning that “every Chinese was a bandit or a potential bandit and there was only one treatment for them, they were to be ‘bashed around.’ If they would not take a sock in the jaw, a kick in the gut might have the desired result.”¹³⁹ A captured Ethiopian pilot described the bombing of Eritrea in the early 1980s in similar terms: “We definitively know civilians will get hurt. But, knowing that the people sympathize with the rebels, the order is to bomb everything that moves.”¹⁴⁰ This defeats the logic of indiscriminate violence (and shapes identities endogenously). In his participant-observation study of a Catholic ghetto in Belfast, Jeffrey Sluka found out that

Because of the stereotype that “all” people in Divis either belong to or strongly support the IRA and the INLA, the Security Forces treat them all as guerrilla sympathizers, and the Loyalist paramilitaries consider them all to be legitimate targets for political assassination. This has resulted in turning many who did not support the IRA or INLA before into supporters, sympathizers, and in some cases even members today. One of the best ways to turn politically moderate or apathetic Divis residents into IRA and INLA supporters or members is for policemen and British soldiers to unjustly harass, intimidate, and brutalize them, and for Loyalist extremists to assassinate members of the community. . . . Repression of the Catholic population by the Security Forces is enough to generate enough support for the guerrillas to ensure their survival.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War*, pp. 35–36.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948–1960* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 73.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Alexander De Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), p. 123.

¹⁴¹ Jeffrey A. Sluka, *Hearts and Minds, Water and Fish: Support for the IRA and INLA in a Northern Irish Ghetto* (Greenwich: JAI press, 1989), pp. 288–289, 300.

THE PARADOX OF TERRORISM IN CIVIL WAR:
WHY DOES INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE OCCUR?

Clearly, the deterrent aim of indiscriminate violence is often defeated by its very application. This is true even when the chances of survival by joining the rebels are relatively low: confronted with high levels of indiscriminate incumbent violence many people prefer to fight no matter how high the risk rather than die a humiliating and defenseless death. In the Vendée during the French Revolution, the indiscriminate repression of the Republican armies forced desperate peasants to join the counter-revolutionaries so that they could “sell their life at the highest price by defending themselves with vehemence,”¹⁴² since “fighting and eventually dying with them was preferable to certain death outside one’s own home.”¹⁴³

The sheer inefficiency of indiscriminate violence has prompted speculation that it is an irrational reflection of particular ideologies or the result of the “adrenaline of war zones;”¹⁴⁴ deterrence is just a “fig leaf” for outright genocide or pure unmitigated acts of revenge on a defenseless population.¹⁴⁵ However, before resorting to ideological irrationality it makes sense to examine and reject alternative explanations. I review four arguments that account for why indiscriminate violence is being observed: it reflects truncated data, ignorance, cost, or institutional constraints.

TRUNCATED DATA

Selective violence is much more likely to be missed or miscoded because of the tendency, described above, to assume that all violence is indiscriminate. Moreover, there is some evidence suggesting that selective violence is much more widespread than we tend to think. Careful observers note patterns in violence that often go unnoticed. For example, an important part of the German violence that took place in Athens neighborhoods during the summer of 1944 targeted specific individuals; these neighborhoods were cordoned off and their inhabitants taken to the central square where local hooded informers would finger individual suspects. Gardner points out “that the Germans in occupied Greece often exercised little selectivity and merely rounded up and executed all males, between the ages of 16 and 60 who were found in villages adjacent to the scene of the attack, should

¹⁴² Babeuf, *La guerre de la Vendée et le système de dépopulation* [The War of the Vendée and the System of Depopulation], in Reynald Secher and Jean-Joël Brégeon (eds.), p. 120.

¹⁴³ Dupuy, *Les Chouans*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Loizos, “Intercommunal Killing in Cyprus,” *Man* 23 (1988), p. 650.

¹⁴⁵ Leonardo Paggi, *Storia e memoria di un massacro ordinario* [History and Memory of an Ordinary Massacre] (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1996).

not obscure the fact that most of their victims were suspected communists or sympathizers who were arrested on the basis of information supplied locally.”¹⁴⁶ Henderson tells the story of an attack against the Colombian hamlet of El Topacio in May 1952. A leader of the attackers who “knew the place and its people” strolled from house to house playing a musical instrument, the *tiple*. “On that day, the musician was both judge and jury, for, wherever he paused, the bandits dragged out and shot every man and boy. Ninety-one died in that incident alone.”¹⁴⁷ Likewise, the massacre of 140 men and boys from the village of San Pablo, in the same country, in early 1953, seems indiscriminate on the surface, until one learns that the victims were all Liberals whose credentials had been “carefully checked to verify affiliation.” F. J. West, Jr., reports that when the Vietcong attacked a district of Binh Son, in 1967, they burned one section of six houses but not the adjacent houses.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, though much more recently, the homes of about 30 people in the Afghan village of Shakar Daria were burned by the Taliban, but the rest of the village was left untouched.¹⁴⁹ As Rana Mitter points out about China: “The impression given, in other words, is that the Japanese exercised random violence in Manchuria, whereas the evidence suggests that violence was part of a whole repertoire of techniques of coercion, and that co-optation remained their preferred option when available.”¹⁵⁰ Lastly, incumbents do not use “indiscriminate violence indiscriminately.” They often refrain from resorting to it even when they have the ability to exercise it,¹⁵¹ something that usually goes unreported, thus causing a selection bias. For example, Germans often refrained from reprisals.¹⁵²

Given the state of the data, we just do not know what the universe of violence looks like. Nevertheless, descriptions of indiscriminate violence

¹⁴⁶ Hugh H. Gardner, *Guerrilla and Counter guerrilla Warfare in Greece, 1941–1945* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the U.S. Army, 1962), p. 154.

¹⁴⁷ James D. Henderson, *When Colombia Bled: A History of the Violencia in Tolima* (Birmingham: The University of Alabama Press, 1985), pp. 150–152.

¹⁴⁸ West also noted the surprising absence of reaction to this pattern: “no one asked why the VC had singled them out” (see West, *The Village*, p. 273).

¹⁴⁹ “Once Fertile Valley Left Arid by Taliban,” *The New York Times* (7 January 2002), p. A9.

¹⁵⁰ Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 180.

¹⁵¹ E.g., Patrick McGrath, “Bristol and the Civil War,” in R.C. Richardson (ed.), *The English Civil Wars: Local Aspects* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 1997), p. 112.

¹⁵² Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella resistenza* [A Civil War: A Historical Essay on the Morality in the Resistance] (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1994), p. 481.

are numerous enough to suggest that no matter how bad our data, genuinely indiscriminate violence takes place often enough to warrant attention.

IGNORANCE

Most accounts of the use of indiscriminate violence focus on the individual level. The combination of weak army discipline and strong emotions (such as anger at the loss of comrades) generates frustration and stress. According to Dave Grossman:

The recent loss of friends and beloved leaders in combat can also enable violence on the battlefield. . . . in many circumstances soldiers react with anger (which is one of the well-known response stages to death and dying), and then the loss of comrades can enable killing. . . . Revenge killing during a burst of rage has been a recurring theme throughout history, and it needs to be considered in the overall equation of factors that enable killing on the battlefield.¹⁵³

A Guatemalan peasant justified the violence of the army in similar terms: “When they killed people, it was because they were filled with anger because their fellow soldiers had been cut down in battle.”¹⁵⁴ This is even more the case where insurgents avoid open combat and it is practically impossible to distinguish civilians from rebels;¹⁵⁵ soldiers, this argument goes, will tend to vent their anger by using violence indiscriminately against civilians, especially when they reach the conclusion, as one U.S. loyalist did in 1780, that “every man is a soldier.”¹⁵⁶ Fear is another emotion associated with indiscriminate violence,¹⁵⁷ as is pleasure.¹⁵⁸ Fellman describes how many fighters in Missouri saw the war as a version of hunting;¹⁵⁹ a former intelligence chief of Rhodesia recalls that the

¹⁵³ Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, p. 179.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala*, p. 100.

¹⁵⁵ Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*, p. 94; Li, *The Japanese Army in North China, 1937–1941*, p. 232.

¹⁵⁶ Robert M. Weir, “‘The Violent Spirit,’ the Reestablishment of Order, and the Continuity of Leadership in Post-Revolutionary South Carolina,” in Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert (eds.), *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), p. 74.

¹⁵⁷ Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁸ John Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War,’” *International Security* 25 (2000), pp. 42–70; Katz, *Seductions of Crime: A Chilling Exploration of the Criminal Mind – from Juvenile Delinquency to Cold-blooded Murder*; Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, pp. 92–94.

¹⁵⁹ Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War*, pp. 176–184.

elite Selous Scouts units attracted “vainglorious extroverts and a few psychopathic killers.”¹⁶⁰ These attitudes are compounded by the lack of training¹⁶¹ or, worse, resources: armies forced to live off the land will tend to use indiscriminate violence.¹⁶² Civil wars offer plenty of opportunities for extortion and blackmail,¹⁶³ while exposure to danger and death causes brutalization.¹⁶⁴ Obviously, none of this is limited to incumbents. The recollection of an Italian partisan is suggestive:

When you’ve been eight, nine months, a year up in the mountains, you come down, you’re half a beast. There’s no two ways about it. You’re not a normal man. Today, I say, I was a beast. I realize that in those times I had lost my reason. You’ve come down the mountain with that constant hatred, constant war, weapons, always expecting to be shot in the back, always expecting a bullet . . .¹⁶⁵

Although most of these factors are plausible, they are ultimately insufficient as they say nothing about collective-level factors that may allow or not free rein to emotions and individual behavior.

At the collective level, most accounts point to ignorance and organizational incompetence. Thompson reports a joke: “There are only two types of Generals in counter-insurgency – those who haven’t yet learnt and those who never will!”¹⁶⁶ The Vietnam War provides a prime example. For years, the U.S. military leadership failed to grasp the nature of the war.¹⁶⁷ As a General recalled: “Soon after I arrived in Vietnam it became obvious to me that I had neither a real understanding of the nature of the war nor any clear idea as to how to win it.”¹⁶⁸ “Let’s go out and kill some Viet Cong, then we can worry about intelligence,” quipped a newly arrived General.¹⁶⁹ The absence of frontlines proved to be a major cognitive obstacle for officers trained in conventional war. As a result, much of the data generated by the conflict was not properly processed.¹⁷⁰ As a result, Race argues, “a

¹⁶⁰ Ken Flower, *Serving Secretly: An Intelligence Chief on Record; Rhodesia Into Zimbabwe, 1964–1981* (London: John Murray, 1987), p. 124.

¹⁶¹ Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Mozambique’s War of Independence, 1964–1974*, p. 129.

¹⁶² De Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*, p. 43.

¹⁶³ Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁴ Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA’s Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong*, p. 98.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 139.

¹⁶⁶ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p. 84.

¹⁶⁷ West, *The Village*, p. 256.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Thomas C. Thayer, *War without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p. 84.

¹⁷⁰ Thayer, *War without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam*, p. 4.

theoretical basis for the violence program, consistent both internally and with objective conditions, was never articulated, despite the number of lives it consumed daily. The basis for using violence was a residue of military doctrines developed to deal with friendly military units operating on hostile foreign territory.”¹⁷¹

Proximate factors include undue optimism and lack of preparation, along with the perception that the threat posed by a rebellion is low;¹⁷² fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of irregular war;¹⁷³ inadequate organization and training or just sheer professional incompetence;¹⁷⁴ the oft-noted weak institutional memory and lag in learning and war doctrine updating of the military – a tendency epitomized in the saying that the military fights not the present war but the last one;¹⁷⁵ the prevalence of authoritarian structures among the military as well as its politicization;¹⁷⁶ and last, plain racism.¹⁷⁷ As Neil Sheehan points out about the South Vietnamese army, most “Saigon officers did not feel any guilt over this butchery and sadism. [They] had come to see that they regarded the peasantry as some sort of subspecies. They were not taking human life and destroying human homes. They were exterminating treacherous animals and stamping out their dens.”¹⁷⁸ A problem with such explanations is that they seem unable to account for the bewildering variation in levels of indiscriminate violence. For example, in the occupied Soviet Union, the Germans (whose Nazi outlook was constant) considerably varied the kind and intensity of violence they used.

¹⁷¹ Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, p. 227.

¹⁷² John P. Cann, *Counterinsurgency in Africa: The Portuguese Way of War, 1961–1974* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 63.

¹⁷³ Sam C. Sarkesian, “The American Response to Low-Intensity Conflict: The Formative Period,” in David A. Charters and Maurice Tugwell (eds.), *Armies in Low-Intensity Conflicts: A Comparative Analysis* (London: Brassey’s Defense Publishers, 1989), pp. 44–45.

¹⁷⁴ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Operation*, p. 31; Richard Duncan Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), p. 133.

¹⁷⁵ It appears that the lessons learned in Korea went unheeded in Vietnam, and so did the Vietnam lessons in Central America [see Amrom Katz, “An Approach to Future Wars of National Liberation,” in Sam C. Sarkesian (ed.), *Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1975), p. 589].

¹⁷⁶ Mason and Krane, “The Political Economy of Death Squads: Toward a Theory of the Impact of State-Sanctioned Terror,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989), pp. 175–198; Douglas S. Blaufarb and George K. Tanham, *Who Will Win? A Key to the Puzzle of Revolutionary War* (New York: Crane Russak, 1989), p. 19.

¹⁷⁷ Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (eds.), *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941–1944* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

¹⁷⁸ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, p. 110.

Ignorance is a cause of indiscriminate violence that ought to be qualified. The reason is that political actors often seem aware of the deleterious effects of indiscriminate violence. During the Spanish Civil War, Catalan Republicans warned that indiscriminate violence against opponents in the Republican zone was bringing about a “counter-revolutionary climate in the rearward;”¹⁷⁹ yet they did not refrain from using it. After a particularly bloody wave of reprisals in Greece, the German minister plenipotentiary for Southeast Europe, Hermann Neubacher, complained to the military commander of the relevant area:

It is utter insanity to murder babies . . . because heavily armed Red bandits billeted themselves, overnight, by force, in their houses, and because they killed two German soldiers near the village. The political effect of this senseless blood bath doubtlessly by far exceeds the effect of all propaganda efforts in our fight against Communism.¹⁸⁰

Yet the Germans kept resorting to mass reprisals. Although the officer in charge of counterinsurgency in the Philippine island of Negros during the 1980s, “knew that the average, unarmed rural peasant was in no position to resist the NPA, he nonetheless set out to demonstrate how miserable life could be for ‘collaborators,’ making entire communities pay the price for the infractions of any of their members.”¹⁸¹ U.S. military doctrine, as early as 1951,¹⁸² as well as the sprawling counterinsurgency literature of the early 1960s, is replete with warnings about the negative effects of indiscriminate terror – and this includes studies by such official or semi-official outfits (in the U.S.) as the Operations Research Office, the Special Operations Research Office, the Counterinsurgency Information Analysis Center, and the Center for Research in Social Systems.¹⁸³ Major studies

¹⁷⁹ Julio de la Cueva, “Religious Persecution, Anticlerical Tradition, and Revolution: On Atrocities against the Clergy during the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (1998), p. 360.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Condit, *Case Study in Guerrilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 268.

¹⁸¹ Alan Berlow, *Dead Season: A Story of Murder and Revenge* (New York: Vintage, 1998), p. 180.

¹⁸² “Guerrillas may initiate acts of violence in communities that are earnestly cooperating in order to provoke unjust retaliation against these communities. Unjust or misplaced punishment at the hands of the occupying force is vigorously exploited by the guerrillas to gain sympathizers and strengthen their own cause” (United States Department of Defense, FM 31-20, “Operations Against Guerrilla Forces,” quoted in Barton, *Salient Operational Aspects of Paramilitary Warfare in Three Asian Areas*, p. 3).

¹⁸³ E.g., A. Thomas Ferguson, Jr., “Sources for the Study of Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare,” in Sam C. Sarkesian (ed.), *Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1975), pp. 617–623; Adrian H. Jones and Andrew R. Molnar, *Internal Defense against Insurgency: Six Cases* (Washington, DC: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1966).

such as Project Camelot and Project Agile reached similar conclusions.¹⁸⁴ The widely distributed “Social Science Research Studies” conducted on various aspects of the Vietnam War argued “that more was being lost in terms of loyalty and respect for the GVN and the Americans than was gained in hurting the VC by bombing and shelling of villages, even where they were VC strongholds and fighting bases.”¹⁸⁵ Even the U.S. Army was aware in the late 1960s that “the injury or killing of hapless civilians inevitably contributes to the communist cause.”¹⁸⁶ Yet, the U.S. indiscriminately shelled and bombed countless South Vietnamese villages for many years. Clearly, ignorance must be qualified. The question ought to be restated, then, as follows: why is indiscriminate violence used *in the presence* of knowledge about its counterproductive effects? I point to two factors: cost and institutional distortions.

COST

An overriding consideration in the use of indiscriminate violence is the cost of selective violence.¹⁸⁷ Identifying, locating, and “neutralizing” enemies (and their civilian collaborators) one by one requires a complex and costly infrastructure. As Alan Berlow puts it:

A major problem for the Philippine military, however, was the one the Americans encountered in Vietnam: They couldn’t figure out who the “fish” were until they started shooting. To be on the safe side, Filipinos, like the Americans in Vietnam, erred on the side of overkill and assumed that anyone was an enemy until proven otherwise.¹⁸⁸

Most incumbents realize quickly that they lack the necessary resources. In a directive sent to the units occupying the Soviet Union, the German Central Command pointed out that “the Commanders must find the means of keeping order within the regions where security is their responsibility, not by demanding more forces, but by applying suitable draconian measures.”¹⁸⁹ Resorting to indiscriminate violence, Matthew Cooper concludes, led to a vicious cycle:

¹⁸⁴ Michael F. Brown and Eduardo Fernández *War of Shadows: The Struggle for Utopia in the Peruvian Amazon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 111–204.

¹⁸⁵ Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, pp. 122–123.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 40.

¹⁸⁷ Surprising as it may seem, the military often quantifies this cost. For example, the estimated cost of killing a single rebel in Kenya was £10,000, in Malaya it exceeded \$200,000, while in Vietnam it reached \$373,000 (Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study*, p. 379; Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Operation*, p. 101).

¹⁸⁸ Berlow, *Dead Season: A Story of Murder and Revenge*, p. 180.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Cooper, *The Nazi War against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944*, p. 143.

Once begun, only sufficient troops made available for security could break the pattern, and although Hitler and the military and SS authorities came to understand the necessity of assigning considerable forces to secure the rear area, they were never able to make them available. . . . The cause of the German failure was both easy to analyse and impossible to rectify; it was simply, lack of troops.¹⁹⁰

In short, indiscriminate violence may initially appear as a handy initial option. Yet, this would explain its emergence rather than persistence.

INSTITUTIONAL DISTORTIONS

Some cases of indiscriminate violence can be explained as resulting from particular institutional distortions, usually located within the incumbent political structure. The Vietnam War provides an excellent illustration. Sheehan describes how the South Vietnamese military and the U.S. high command in Vietnam administered indiscriminate air and artillery bombardment on peasant hamlets at an estimated cost of about 25,000 civilians killed and 50,000 civilians wounded a year.¹⁹¹ A U.S. provincial adviser told Fall that in his area, “we shot a half-million dollar’s worth of howitzer ammunition last month on unobserved targets. Yet the whole provincial budget for information-and intelligence-gathering is \$300.”¹⁹² This violence was premised on the theory that it would “terrorize the peasants out of supporting the Viet Cong. . . . Their attitude was: ‘We’ll teach these people a lesson. We’ll show them how strong and tough we are’.”¹⁹³ This violence alienated the population by killing and wounding large numbers of noncombatants and destroying farm homes and livestock.¹⁹⁴ Sheehan recounts how the U.S. military advisor John Paul Vann denounced the indiscriminate bombing and shelling of the countryside as both cruel and self-defeating. He had initially found it difficult to believe the utter lack of discrimination with which fighter-bombers and artillery were turned loose; apparently, a single shot from a sniper was enough to call for an

¹⁹⁰ Cooper, *The Nazi War against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944*, pp. 143, 153.

¹⁹¹ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*. The South Vietnamese also used selective violence in the early 1960s – especially before the conflict escalated into a full-fledged war (Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*, p. 184). However, selective violence remained quite marginal in the overall scheme of incumbent violence – until years later.

¹⁹² Bernard B. Fall, “Vietnam Blitz: A Report on the Impersonal War,” in *Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism 1959–1975* (New York: The Library of America, 2000), p. 110.

¹⁹³ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, p. 109.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1965), p. 95.

air strike on an artillery barrage on the hamlet from which the sniper had fired. A province or district chief could start firing artillery shells in any direction at any hour of the day or night needing not even an unverified report stating that some guerrillas had gathered in a neighboring hamlet. Vann wondered how any U.S. citizen could think that Vietnamese peasants who lost family members and friends and homes would not be mad; in fact, most Vietnamese farmers had an alternative army and government asking for their allegiance and offering them revenge. Vann alerted his superiors to this fact by arguing that the bombing and shelling “kills many, many more civilians than it ever does [Vietcong] and as a result makes new [Vietcong].” However, he was usually overruled and the hamlets were bombed. As one U.S. Air Force General put it: “The solution in Vietnam is more bombs, more shells, more napalm . . . till the other side cracks and gives up.”¹⁹⁵

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.¹⁹⁶ 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.¹⁹⁷ 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.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, p. 619.

¹⁹⁶ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, p. 650.

¹⁹⁷ A Lieutenant colonel in Vietnam pointed out: “The day I got there, that man [his predecessor] was leaving. He had his hat and coat on, threw me the key and said, ‘There’s the shack. Good Luck. Every day is different around here.’ That’s all the training I had.” Quoted in Katz, “An Approach to Future Wars of National Liberation,” p. 591.

¹⁹⁸ The South Vietnamese regime encouraged this misallocation of military resources because it was unwilling to commit the South Vietnamese military to a full-fledged war; it was primarily concerned instead with preserving its elite troops to protect itself from a coup – as opposed to wasting it in fighting the war. In turn, this calculation could only be sustained because of the perverse effect of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam: the South Vietnamese government assumed that the U.S., as the preeminent power in the world, could not afford to let their anti-Communist government fall to Vietcong.

Institutional distortions can be observed in other cases as well. The French Revolutionary Barère explained the initial failure to put down the rebellion in the Vendée by the “desire for a long war among a large part of the chiefs and administrators.”¹⁹⁹ A Pakistani officer describes the following situation among the army in Bangladesh:

All the divisional commanders and the brigade commanders, except one major-general and one brigadier, invariably assured General Niazi that, despite their meager resources and heavy odds, they would be able to fulfill the task assigned to them. ‘Sir, don’t worry about my sector, we will knock hell out of the enemy when the time comes,’ was the refrain at all these briefings. Any comment different from this was taken to imply lack of confidence and professional competence. Nobody wanted to jeopardize his prospects for future promotion.²⁰⁰

Like cost, institutional distortions may explain the emergence of indiscriminate violence but not its continuation for a long time in light of evidence that it is counterproductive.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE PARADOX

There is little doubt that both cost and institutional distortions explain the use of indiscriminate violence under conditions that make it ineffective. However, these conjectures do not amount to a theoretical account.

The conjecture about the counterproductive character of indiscriminate violence is not based on theory or systematic empirical research. Theoretical work on the related nexus between repression and dissent remains inconclusive.²⁰¹ We also lack controlled comparisons of outcomes in the presence and absence of such violence; likewise, no attention has been given to counterfactuals. For instance, we do not know how many insurgent armed actions would have taken place and how many people would have joined the rebels in the absence of indiscriminate violence. On the theoretical front, it is possible to conceptualize the decision to use indiscriminate violence by incumbents as a two-stage decision (Figure 1).

Civilians will collaborate with the incumbents if the insurgents fail to protect them, whether incumbents are indiscriminate or selective; they will support the insurgents when they succeed in protecting them against the indiscriminate violence of the incumbents; when insurgents protect and incumbents are selective, the outcome is indeterminate, with stalemate probable. This yields the following interesting result: incumbents can

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 338.

²⁰⁰ Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p. 117.

²⁰¹ Lichbach, “Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent,” p. 297.

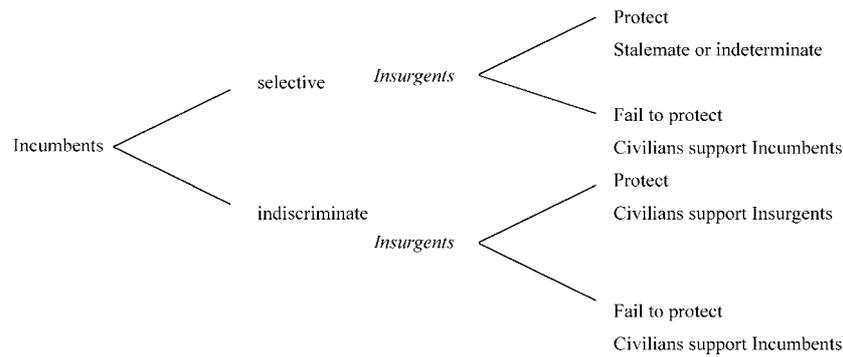


Figure 1. Civilian behavior as a function of indiscriminate violence and protection.

afford to be indifferent about the type of violence they resort to when insurgents are unable to offer any protection to civilians. Put otherwise, costly discrimination can be dispensed with when insurgents are exceedingly weak (conversely, insurgents can afford to be indiscriminate when incumbents are on the verge of defeat). Indiscriminate violence does succeed in paralyzing an unsuspecting, unprepared, and unprotected population – as many insurgents note in their memoirs. When U.S. indiscriminate violence made the Filipino civilians “thoroughly sick of the war,” they “were forced to commit themselves to one side;” soon garrison commanders “received civilian delegations who disclosed the location of guerrilla hideouts or denounced members of the infrastructure.”²⁰² As a Peruvian peasant told Carlos Iván Degregori about *Sendero Luminoso*: “They told us it is necessary to be ready for the war, to defeat the enemy. We had believed them. But once they attacked Huanta after attacking and killing two guardias they escaped through here and they screwed us; they turned us over; they practically sold us out. Well this is not manly.”²⁰³ Guatemala provides the paradigmatic case in this respect. After the Guatemalan army used massive indiscriminate violence against the population, civilians who had initially collaborated with the rebels were left with no choice but defect, because the rebels utterly failed to protect the population from massacres.²⁰⁴ As Stoll points out, “while the guerrillas could not be defeated militarily, they were unable to protect their supporters.”²⁰⁵ In short, indiscriminate

²⁰² Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902*, pp. 56–58.

²⁰³ Degregori, “Harvesting Storms: Peasant Rondas and the Defeat of *Sendero Luminoso* in Ayacucho,” p. 141.

²⁰⁴ John M. Watanabe, *Maya Saints and Souls in a Changing World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), p. 181.

²⁰⁵ Stoll, *Between Two Armies: In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, p. 6.

violence is effective when there is a steep imbalance of power between the two actors.

Hence, given reasonably strong insurgents, indiscriminate violence is unsustainable. We would expect rational incumbents to muster additional resources and subject institutional distortions to the imperatives of their long-term interests. If this reasoning is correct, we ought to observe a shift over time from mostly indiscriminate violence to mostly selective violence. There is substantial evidence suggesting that this is indeed the case.

The transition to more selective forms of violence is particularly striking in the wars fought by German occupiers against European resistance movements during WW II. If there is one political actor whose racist outlook should have clouded its sense of instrumental rationality, this is clearly the Nazis. They were fighting a total war and their prospects of victory by 1944 were dim, to say the least. The German army was overstretched and many European countries were occupied by very thin forces. Hence a policy of indiscriminate violence was over-determined by both ideological and strategic factors. Yet a closer examination shows a remarkable and unexpected, if partial, evolution from indiscriminate violence to a mix of selective and indiscriminate violence, whereby the former came to play an increasingly important role. In Greece for instance, after a particularly bloody wave of indiscriminate violence in December 1943 which left more than 1,300 Greek villagers dead, German commanders were ordered “to seize the perpetrator himself and take reprisal measures only as a second course, if through reprisal measures the prevention of future attacks is to be expected;” in addition, the authority to order reprisals was removed from lower ranks and moved up to division commanders who also had to get the accord of the competent administrative territorial commander.²⁰⁶ Although these measures were never fully implemented (and final responsibility for reprisals usually rested with the commander on the spot), this indicated a willingness to change course in the face of the obvious effects of indiscriminate violence. The formation of a Greek auxiliary corps, the Security Battalions, and its explosive growth in the Spring and Summer 1944 led to higher levels of discrimination in violence through these troops’ access to local information. A former Greek partisan notes in his memoirs that unlike the Germans, the Greek auxiliaries targeted the homes of families whose men were guerrillas or sympathizers.²⁰⁷ A similar process took place elsewhere in Europe. Heilbrunn points out that “it is not widely known that the Germans in the

²⁰⁶ Condit, *Case Study in Guerrilla War: Greece during World War II*, pp. 265–266.

²⁰⁷ Svolos, *Andartis sta vouna tou Moria. Odoiporiko (1947–49)*, p. 25.

last war finally came to the same conclusions [i.e., that indiscriminate violence was counterproductive] and tried to make a drastic change in their policy.”²⁰⁸ They issued orders to the effect that reprisals should be taken against the people only if they voluntarily had helped the partisans and that collective punitive actions had to be taken only if “absolutely necessary;” in such cases, the reasons had to be carefully explained to the people.²⁰⁹ They also encouraged the growth of local militias and auxiliary troops and established “self-defense villages” (*Wehrdoerfer*) in which the peasants were permitted to carry arms and organize to ward off partisan raids.²¹⁰ In some cases, army commanders granted collaborating units a very substantial degree of autonomy.²¹¹ By the end of the war the number of Soviets serving in assorted German auxiliary units far outstripped that of the partisans fighting against the Germans.²¹² The Japanese were likewise forced to switch their policy in China along similar dimensions, moving from indiscriminate violence to more discriminate forms based on local militias raised following the traditional *Pao-Chia* system.²¹³

The same shift, only much more pronounced in the direction of selectivity, took place in Vietnam. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the U.S. switched from indiscriminate violence to one of the most sophisticated programs of selective violence, called “Phoenix.” The goal was to kill, jail, or intimidate into defection the members of the Vietcong apparatus in the South “person by person.”²¹⁴ By 1971, the war was transformed into “one in which whom we killed was far more important than how many we killed;”²¹⁵ a CIA operative told Moyar that “we had 75 percent of the key [Vietcong] cadres named.”²¹⁶ Tens of thousands of

²⁰⁸ Heilbrunn, *Partisan Warfare*, p. 147.

²⁰⁹ Apparently, the Germans also changed their treatment of the partisans they captured: “They had learned by bitter experience that harshness stiffened partisan resistance and that if anything could weaken it, it was the more lenient treatment of partisan prisoners” (Heilbrunn, *Partisan Warfare*, pp. 148 and 151).

²¹⁰ According to a German report: “The aim must be: The peasants themselves should defend their property against the band, in which task they can be supplied by us with weapons and technical help, if they have proved their reliability” (quoted in Cooper, *The Nazi War against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944*, p. 107).

²¹¹ Alexander Dallin, Ralph Mavrogordato and Wilhelm Moll, “Partisan Psychological Warfare and Popular Attitudes,” in John A. Armstrong (ed.), *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 327–333.

²¹² Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study*, p. 209.

²¹³ Li, *The Japanese Army in North China, 1937–1941*, pp. 204–209.

²¹⁴ Sam Adams, *War of Numbers: An Intelligence Memoir* (South Royalton: Steerforth Press, 1994), p. 178.

²¹⁵ Herrington, *Stalking the Vietcong*, p. 69.

²¹⁶ Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, p. 146.

Vietnamese were imprisoned or killed – and this appears to have been quite effective in getting South Vietnamese peasants to minimize their collaboration with the Vietcong after 1971.²¹⁷ Christian Geffray documents a similar trend in the Mozambique: many people had been reluctant to leave Renamo-held places for government-controlled areas because they would be indiscriminately killed and mutilated by government soldiers.²¹⁸ However, incumbents recognized the error of these ways by switching to a combination of selective violence and amnesty. Likewise the Russians became more selective in Chechnya, raising a Chechen militia which fought with the Russian army.²¹⁹ A recent report by a Russian human-rights organization documents a shift in the tactics of the Russian army from *zachistki* or mopping-up raids, “its previously preferred method of hunting down rebels” to disappearances and kidnappings of rebel suspects which have increased.²²⁰ There is considerable evidence documenting similar shifts to higher levels of discrimination in violence in a variety of civil wars.²²¹

The same holds true for insurgents. In the course of the Chinese Civil War, the communists discovered that ideologically motivated assassinations of isolated gentry members solely on the basis of their identity forced otherwise rival gentry into a temporary coalition against them; this led to reprisals that were highly effective because gentry members could easily obtain reliable information about whom to target, thus “greatly eroding peasant morale and eventually putting a halt to the Communist peasant movement;” the same applied to grain seizures which, “although highly appealing to peasants, invariably produced unintended adverse results. They often involved much killing and pillaging. Grain seizure might appeal to poor peasants in one locality, but random violence and killing destroyed villages in other localities and drove settled peasants to the gentry side. . . . Random violence in fact promoted community cohesion by rallying peasants to the gentry. It also polarized local communities and made it impossible for the communists to expand their movement.” As a result, the Communist Party explicitly forbade indiscriminate killing and criticized peasant cadres’ perceptions that in conflicts with rival local militias

²¹⁷ Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, pp. 298–318.

²¹⁸ Christian Geffray, *La cause des armes au Mozambique: anthropologie d’une guerre civile* [The Causes of Conflict in Mozambique: Anthropology of a Civil War] (Paris: Karthala, 1990).

²¹⁹ Michael R. Gordon, “Chechens Say They Were Shot at in Safe Corridor,” *The New York Times* (17 December 1999), p. A1.

²²⁰ *The Economist* (22 March 2003), p. 46.

²²¹ For more evidence, see Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

it was normal to kill hundreds of peasants.²²² Patricia Griffin found that the Communists recognized that the “red terror” resulting from “harsh indiscriminate action” was counterproductive and redefined their policy of violence; they were more selective during the Yen-an period (1935–1941) compared to the earlier Kiangsi Soviet (1924–1933): “Rather than sticking stubbornly to past methods, the Communists appeared to learn and experiment.”²²³ Likewise in Malaya, the Communist leaders decided that “blind and heated foolhardiness” was to be avoided in the future, while the emphasis was to be on “regulated and moderate methods.”²²⁴ In Vietnam, the Communist Party exercised “much tighter control over the procedures for approving executions after 1954, because of the unfavorable consequences of the many careless executions that occurred during the Resistance” and abandoned the random bombing of urban centers.²²⁵

An important implication of this argument is that a major reason why wars of occupation turn into civil wars is precisely the fact that indiscriminate violence is counterproductive. The need for selective violence forces occupiers to rely on local agents, thus driving a wedge between the native population.

To conclude: instances of indiscriminate violence generally reflect either a steep imbalance of power between the actors or a lag in learning: political actors appear to engage in it because it is much cheaper than its alternatives; yet they eventually figure out that it is counterproductive and switch over to selective violence.

This paper also makes a methodological point: it demonstrates the necessity of analytical and empirical disaggregation with a focus on the underlying logic of the phenomenon that is analyzed: like many other concepts, and probably more than most, the concept of terrorism is still opaque. In this respect, analytically and empirically informed conceptual groundwork remains essential.

Yale University
New Haven, CT 06520-8301
USA
E-mail: stathis.kalyvas@yale.edu

²²² Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan*, pp. 123, 142.

²²³ Patricia E. Griffin, *The Chinese Communist Treatment of Counterrevolutionaries: 1924–1949* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 93–94, 146.

²²⁴ Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study*, p. 290; Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p. 25.

²²⁵ Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, p. 189; Fall, “Vietnam Blitz: A Report on the Impersonal War,” p. 111.