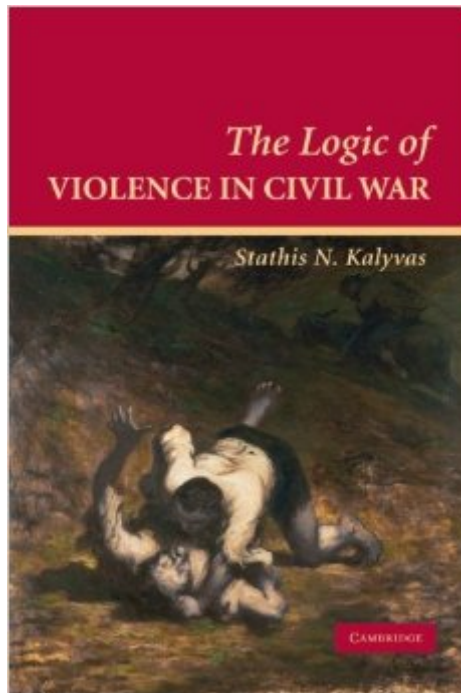


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The Logic Of Violence In Civil War (Cambridge Studies In Comparative Politics)



Synopsis

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

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a detailed, heavily annotated, extremely logic based thesis on the etiologies of violence in civil wars. There are many examples included of many civil wars. Very few of the examples are graphic in nature. Symmetrical and asymmetrical wars are examined separately. Each chapter posits postulates which are examined both by logical analysis and references at least twenty civil wars in the last hundred years to arrive at hypotheses which are tested against the history, e.g. The Mau Mau, Philippine, Greek situations. Deeper history civil wars also frequently serve as a fund of examples, i.e. Verdun in the French Revolution and the American Revolution, and the American

Civil War, especially the Missouri situation. Unless you are up for logical analysis of history, this is a heavy read. The book is well written by a man who obviously knows the topic, and has done related original research on the Greek Civil War. It would make great gift for a history graduate student, or student in a military academy.

Bottom Line: this is a useful book in that it provides a framework for describing and evaluating violence in civil wars. In this book, Kalyvas argues that violence in civil war has much less to do with emotions, ideology, culture, greed, and grievance than commonly believed. He argues that violence only happens in areas not under 'control,' and that it is usually the result of pre-conflict animosities. At the micro-level, civil war violence is neither random nor indiscriminate and is a result of an interactive system that includes central and local actors, combatants and noncombatants alike; each of whom has their own personal motivations. "Civil wars privatize politics," he says and violence in civil wars fulfills a variety of functions; a central aspect of it is its ability to generate compliance among a target audience. Kalyvas uses everyone from Thucydides to the current literature on the war in Iraq to provide evidence, and uses a case study of the 1943-1949 Greek Civil War to provide his "micro" evidence. The author, Stathis Kalyvas, is a political scientist and professor at Yale, and this book received awards from the American Political Science Association and the European Academy of Sociology as the "the best book published in the United States during the prior year on government, politics or international affairs."

The book starts off a bit focused and mostly has a collection of anecdotes. However, as it goes on, it builds a simple but profound model of war and counterinsurgency. It definitely helps explain when and why we see so much indiscriminate violence in civil wars, even though it also could be counterproductive. Kalyvas points to the role of local informants and denunciation as determinants of warring parties' ability to use selective violence and target actual enemies. Overall, this book is that rare thing in political science - both accessible and profound.

Appears to build upon that venerable study by Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority*, Rand 1970, which was informed by the Vietnam War, which is all to the good. As an erstwhile practitioner, my experience (Vietnam, as well) tells me that moving a conceptual discussion of insurgency/counterinsurgency off a "hearts and minds" focus and squarely onto an examination of the ways in which control determines the behavior of the population, more accurately reflects reality. Adducing evidence from a wide spectrum of conflicts, Kalyvas succeeds in systematizing how this

phenomenon occurs, including, inter alia, the "cascade effect" of generating loyalty on the part of family members to the side which conscripts their son into its armed service or militia. This was observed in Vietnam, but Kalyvas cites other examples to show wide applicability of this mechanism.

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