



# Civil war and violence against civilians

CDSN4002 POLITICAL VIOLENCE

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# Agenda

- ▶ Why do people participate in civil wars?
- ▶ What purpose does violence against civilians serve in civil war?

# Civil war

- ▶ What is civil war?
- ▶ How do we distinguish civil war from other types of direct violence?
- ▶ Why is it important to properly identify civil war?

# Why do people join rebel groups?

- ▶ Non-rationalist explanation: grievances, frustration
- ▶ Rationalist explanations: individual and collective incentives
  - ▶ Private benefits of participation, social pressure and social sanctions

# Rational choice approach to violence

- ▶ Mass violence is not an act of barbarism but a war strategy
- ▶ Central question: *Why do incumbents or insurgents kill civilians?*
- ▶ Violence affects civilian support during war
- ▶ Some reasons: to find infiltrated enemies and prevent civilian defection, ...others?

# Selective vs. indiscriminate violence

- ▶ **Selective (discriminant) violence:** when individuals are targeted based on personalized information about their actions;
- ▶ **Indiscriminate violence:** 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
- ▶ Both aim to generate *compliance via deterrence* (i.e., to control the population)

# A theory of selective violence

- ▶ Rebels and gov. forces often don't have full control over the territory
- ▶ Territorial control requires collaboration of civilians
- ▶ Most prefer to collaborate with the side that best guarantees their survival rather than defect by helping the rival.
- ▶ Collaboration is uncertain in areas of fragmented sovereignty where both sides are present.

# A theory of selective violence (cont.)

- ▶ Selective violence is used to consolidate control, but it requires *information*
- ▶ Selective violence is the result of transactions between political actors and individuals: it is jointly produced by them.



# Indiscriminate violence

- ▶ *If indiscriminate violence is counterproductive in civil war, why does it occur so often?*
- ▶ Indiscriminate violence as a result of lack of information
- ▶ Indiscriminate violence is cheaper than selective violence (a reason for its emergence)
- ▶ What are the reasons for its perseverance?

# Kalyvas: the logic of violence in civil war

