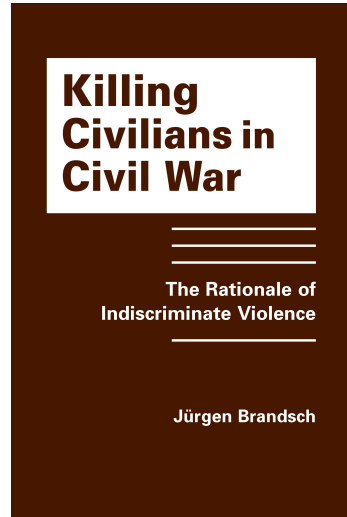


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**Killing Civilians
in Civil War:
The Rationale of
Indiscriminate Violence**

Jürgen Brandsch

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1

Targeting Civilians in Civil Wars

On November 9th in 1941, a German Wehrmacht company arrived in Baranivka, a Ukrainian village. The unit was investigating a partisan attack on a German patrol which had taken place a couple of days earlier in the same village. In this attack one German soldier and two officers had been killed, which made the German command of the rear area increasingly worried about a rising partisan threat. As a consequence, the command ordered an immediate investigation of the incident and the punishment of those who had collaborated with the enemy.

Thus, when the company reached Baranivka, it had orders to retaliate in the harshest way possible. The soldiers began by encircling the village, and then the villagers were gathered near the house of the local physician where the German soldiers had been killed. The commanding officer interrogated the villagers, threatening to execute random people if they did not divulge who had been responsible for the attack. However, the villagers were seemingly unable to provide the demanded information. As a consequence, the officer chose ten male inhabitants randomly, and took them to the outskirts of the village where they were shot by a firing-squad. Afterwards most of the houses were burned to the ground and only a few buildings were left for the remaining villagers.¹

This book is about incidents such as the one at Baranivka in 1941. It is about incidents of indiscriminate violence against civilians and the uncomfortable questions that they inevitably raise. What did the Wehrmacht forces at Baranivka actually assume would happen after they left? Did their commanding officer really think the area could be effectively pacified in this way? And, if so, did he have any good reasons for this belief? Even more disturbingly: did repression work? Against the backdrop of “total war” and

the “war of annihilation” in Eastern Europe, this local incident might seem relatively trivial. And yet as we move our analytical focus out from this single atrocity, to consider wider perspectives throughout this book, it will become apparent just how important it is to understand such incidents more deeply. If we are ever to improve our general understanding of why civil wars so often take the deeply atrocious forms that they do and if we are ever to hope for finding remedies against this scourge for humankind, then we need to understand the apparently gratuitous slaughter of civilians better.

When we begin to do so it soon becomes clear that this subject is potentially a huge one: because, sadly, there are Baranivkas (and similar such horrors) all over the globe. Groups of civilians have been and still are attacked in many conflicts. Often these are villages, but cities, ethnic groups, tribes or families also become the target of violence. To name just a few examples, Turkish security forces seem to have attacked and destroyed Kurdish villages after rebel attacks in the 1990s (Marcus, 2009, 221–222), Russian security forces attacked villages in Chechnya (Souleimanov & Siroky, 2016), and French forces initiated a system of collective responsibility in Algeria in the 1950s (Horne, 2006, 113–115). In all these instances the attacks were seemingly a deliberate part of the counterinsurgents’ strategy.

However, this type of reprisal against the civilian population, which the literature often terms “indiscriminate violence,” poses a puzzle for researchers of armed conflicts: why do actors in civil war kill innocent civilians? After all, for all we know, these people had no inclination to directly support the enemy. Therefore, their death can only be either pointless or even detrimental to those responsible for killing them. In fact, the majority of practitioners and researchers are convinced that indiscriminate violence is either ineffective (Kalyvas, 2006; Pape, 1996) or counterproductive (Goodwin, 2001; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007b; E. J. Wood, 2003). Their claim is supported by an abundance of case studies pointing out that indiscriminate violence can massively increase resistance or support for an opponent. Among many other examples researchers noted for the conflicts in El Salvador (Peceny & Stanley, 2010, 69), Northern Ireland (English, 2005, 151), and Vietnam (Race, 1972, 223–226) that indiscriminate violence leads to an upsurge in recruits for the opponent.

Yet, this skeptical assessment of indiscriminate violence obviously has its limits: indiscriminate violence is used in so many conflicts that it is simply implausible to assume it is employed only due to an error of judgment. Consequentially, several authors have recently begun to investigate whether indiscriminate violence might, after all, be able to help a government in its counterinsurgency efforts (e.g. Johnston, 2009; Schubiger, 2014; Zhukov, 2015). These authors argue that indiscriminate violence may be used to coerce civilians into compliance or separate rebels and civilians from each other. But confusion still persists. No theoretical approach has emerged so

far that can explain *how* indiscriminate violence produces coercive effects that outweigh the potential counterproductive effects.

The picture is complicated by a multiplicity of comparative and quantitative empirical findings both supporting and contradicting the notion that indiscriminate violence against civilians can have positive effects for the perpetrator. Many studies find indiscriminate violence to be detrimental to the perpetrator (Arreguin-Toft, 2003; Kocher, Pepinsky, & Kalyvas, 2011; Schubiger, 2014; Schutte, 2017b). This line of research has produced strong evidence of the increase in resistance following indiscriminate violence. And yet, a smaller number of studies provides evidence for positive effects; here, indiscriminate violence is found to repress rebels or increase the probability of winning for the perpetrator (e.g. Arreguin-Toft, 2005; Lyall, 2009).

Therefore, unfortunately, the current state of the literature leaves us with many questions. In particular, it remains unexplained *how* the killing of innocent civilians can help the perpetrator. This is a deeply theoretical question as we do not know what benefits exactly a perpetrator can derive from indiscriminate violence. Going back to the example at the beginning, the central question is: *how* did the German army profit from killing ten random villagers, given that there is considerable evidence that such reprisals increase further resistance?

I seek to close this knowledge gap by providing two simple propositions.

First, I will start by acknowledging that indiscriminate violence can produce both types of effects, counterproductive and coercive, at the same time. But their respective strength depends on the circumstances. The theory I put forth will be able to integrate both effects into one framework in order to assess whether the perpetrator is able to achieve a positive overall effect.

Second, and perhaps counterintuitively, I will point out that the purpose of violence may not be coercing the group targeted with violence. Currently, much of the literature on indiscriminate violence assumes that violence against one group seeks to coerce that same group. However, perpetrators may be interested in communicating to a wider audience that goes well beyond the targeted group. As I will show, widening our view of potential targets of coercion helps us to understand the gains that can be derived from violence. In short: we need to stand right back to see both a wider and a deeper landscape of possibility.

With regard to the example of the village of Baranivka this means that the Wehrmacht may not have been interested in the coercive or counterproductive effects of the attack on Baranivka itself. Perhaps their horizons were wider, in fact, it may have willingly embraced the counterproductive effects within that village in order to demonstrate something to other villages. If the attack on Baranivka were able to coerce many villages in the vicinity, potential counterproductive effects within Baranivka might still be outweighed for the Wehrmacht.

Deriving from these two propositions I hope to provide a theoretical framework that can be the nucleus for a new way of thinking about indiscriminate violence and its effects.

The Focus of This Study and Definitions of Terms

As I will outline in the next chapters, one particular problem within the literature on indiscriminate violence is an ambiguous usage of terms and concepts. Here, in particular, we look through a glass darkly. Although I will devote some space to the discussion of these problems later, it is necessary to clarify upfront the terms and concepts used in this book.

The aim of this book put in one sentence is to study *the effects of strategic indiscriminate violence against civilians in civil wars*. Therefore, it is important to start with a brief clarification of the terms violence, strategic violence, civilians and indiscriminate violence. In general, I will follow existing definitions as much as possible in order to make my study compatible with previous research.

Definitions of violence are notoriously problematic and the study of violence has been described as a “conceptual minefield” (Kalyvas, 2006, 19). In everyday language many actions and even speech can be termed violence (Nimni, 2017). However, this conceptual stretching entails the danger of misunderstandings. In order to reduce the risk of confusion, I will use a conservative concept of violence. I will follow Kalyvas in defining violence as inflicting physical harm and I will concentrate exclusively on lethal violence (Kalyvas, 2006, 20). While nonlethal forms of violence are important in their own right, the sheer amount of people killed in civil wars makes it a foremost interest of researchers and policy-makers to understand the murder of people.

Strategic violence is the deliberate usage of violence by an organization for the purpose of benefiting the organization. It is particularly important to distinguish strategic from opportunistic violence (see e.g. E. J. Wood, 2010, 299). While strategic violence is decided by the leadership of an organization, opportunistic violence is violence carried out by individuals for their own individual gains. As a consequence, opportunistic violence may even be detrimental to the goals of the organization.

I define a civilian as a person who is not fully employed as a soldier in either a rebel organization or the armed forces of a particular country. Therefore, the civilian category also includes collaborators and supporters of military organizations who are devoting only part of their efforts to helping a group (cf. Kalyvas, 2006, 19).

Indiscriminate violence is a problematic term, as competing and ambiguous definitions exist. Currently, the central text that most of the lit-

erature refers to is Stathis Kalyvas' book *The Logic of Violence*, in which he distinguishes between two categories of violence: *selective* and *indiscriminate*. Kalyvas defines selective violence as violence that targets opponents on an individual level: "Violence is selective when there is an intention to ascertain individual guilt" (Kalyvas, 2006, 142). Thus, actors use selective violence when they seek to punish individuals such as an informant working for the opponent. In contrast, Kalyvas defines indiscriminate violence very clearly as violence targeting groups (Kalyvas, 2006, 142).

Yet challenges remain. Unfortunately, as I point out in Chapter 2, the application of the term indiscriminate violence often remains imprecise. Most importantly, this term may confound strategic violence (violence that follows a strategy to benefit an organization) with nonstrategic violence (e.g. violence that results from individual motives such as greed or violence stemming from errors in targeting). Although this does not pose a problem for Kalyvas' original analysis (Kalyvas, 2006), which concentrates on the causes of violence, I show in Chapter 2 that this categorization leads to difficulties when seeking to apply it to the effects of violence.

Arguably, we need to disaggregate further. As a consequence, I have opted for a categorization that separates several ideal types of violence:

- Following Kalyvas, violence targeting individuals based on their behavior, which I will call selective violence.
- Violence targeting groups such as villages, tribes or ethnic groups, based on their group-behavior, which I will call group-selective violence.
- Violence without a targeting rule or a perceivable targeting pattern, which I will call arbitrary violence.

My categorization thus builds on previous efforts by Kalyvas (2006), Steele (2009), and E. J. Wood (2010) and is described in greater detail in Chapter 4. In this way, I can distinguish the strategic targeting patterns on the individual level and the group-level from the nonstrategic violence in arbitrary violence.

Therefore, I will circumvent the term indiscriminate violence whenever possible and use the hopefully more precise categorization of these three ideal types. However, when discussing other papers and books, it is often important to use the original terminology. In those cases, the term indiscriminate violence must often be understood as an umbrella term encompassing both group-selective and arbitrary violence.

Finally, since my main focus is on the group-selective part of indiscriminate violence, it is important to define what I mean by groups as well. Since I intend to provide a theory that is as encompassing as possible, I will work with only a minimum definition. I define groups as two or more people who are perceived by a potential perpetrator of violence as a distinct

entity. This way, my theory will be open to incorporate violence against different kinds of groups as tribes, ethnic groups, villages or families.

In sum, these terms set the cornerstones of the book's theoretical and empirical ambition. While particularly the type of violence (strategic and lethal) being investigated is quite narrow, the targets of violence (types of groups and civilians) are more broadly defined, and so the focus is laid on the broader effects of a specific type of violence on groups. This way I want to make plausible the claim that effects of lethal indiscriminate violence and particularly group-selective violence are generalizable across groups and situations.

Government and Nongovernment Violence Against Civilians

Currently, most of the literature on indiscriminate violence against civilians concentrates on government violence, yet there is a growing amount of studies focusing on nongovernment actors. Unfortunately, the academic literature on government and nongovernment violence against civilians exists in relative isolation.² In particular, the literature on terrorism often remains separated from other approaches to violence against civilians.³ One reason for this may be of course that terrorism studies are not exclusively focused on the study of civil wars. Instead, terrorism can be used as a strategy inside and outside armed conflict. However, many authors define terrorism in very similar terms to those outlined in the previous section as "indiscriminate violence." Often the main difference is the fact that terrorism is attributed to nonstate actors while the literature on indiscriminate violence focuses mostly on government actors. As a consequence, it seems reasonable to explore how far government and nongovernment violence against civilians are comparable and if studying them together can be beneficial. While there are certainly differences in the causes of group-selective violence for government and nonstate actors, in this book it is argued that the effects are similar and comparable.

Therefore, I will try to build a bridge between the two literatures which focuses on the effects of group-selective violence against civilians irrespective of the actor. The phenomena explored in terrorism and in government violence studies are sometimes very similar. While not all researchers of terrorism concentrate upon violence against civilians, a large amount of work focuses on this issue specifically (e.g. Goodwin, 2006b; Kydd & Walter, 2006; Pape, 2003; Richardson, 2007; Stepanova, 2008; Wilkinson, 2006).⁴

Several of these authors agree that terrorism using indiscriminate violence against civilians is different from other types of terrorism. For instance, the definition of Fortna (2015) points in that direction:

I define terrorist rebel groups as those who employ a systematic campaign of indiscriminate violence against public civilian targets to influence a wider audience. [...] However, civilian targeting is ubiquitous; almost all rebel groups (and almost all governments involved in civil wars) target individuals as a form of “control” to force cooperation and deter civilians from providing aid to the opponent. [...] By narrowing the definition to deliberately indiscriminate violence, I exclude this more common form of violence and focus on that which makes terrorism so terrifying: its randomness; and so outrageous: the intentional targeting of innocent civilians (as opposed to collaborators). (Fortna, 2015, 522)

Here, Fortna outlines the same distinction as Kalyvas in differentiating indiscriminate violence from selective violence and the awareness of this differentiation can be found quite often in terrorism studies. For instance, Kydd and Walter (2006) cite among others the two logics of attrition and intimidation, which broadly reflect selective and indiscriminate violence. Similarly, Hutchinson (1978) distinguishes between “endorsement terrorism” and “compliance terrorism” and Goodwin (2006b) explicitly focuses on indiscriminate violence in his conceptual development of *categorical terrorism*. Thus, it is possible to state that at least a part of the terrorism literature is conceptually comparable to the literature on indiscriminate violence by governments and focuses on the same phenomena.

By focusing on indiscriminate violence alone, many of the definitional problems of terrorism vanish and most arguments for separating government violence from nongovernment violence become irrelevant. A central argument for the separation of the two phenomena is outlined by Sanchez-Cuenca and De la Calle (2009) who argue that: “[t]he technology of so-called state terrorism (massive arrests, internment, mass executions, etc.) is very different from that of nonstate terrorism (car bombs, hostage taking, assassinations, selective shootings). We do not see the point of merging such disparate forms of violence.” (Sanchez-Cuenca & De la Calle, 2009, 34). However, when focusing on just one “technology” of violence, i.e., group-selective violence, there is no reason for not merging government and nongovernment actors anymore. In this case governments and nongovernment actors are restricted to the same technology.

Others point out that governments and terrorist groups differ in their capabilities and in their institutional constraints (e.g. Hoffman, 2006; Pape, 2003). While these arguments may be true for many cases, they only point to potential differences in the ability and the usefulness of indiscriminate violence for a specific actor. Yet, I argue that once an organization decides to use this type of violence the effects should be similar. Nevertheless, whenever violence is used as coercion, the capabilities of the perpetrator are of course important. The more capable a perpetrator is to use violence, the higher will be the threat he can create for the population. This seems to be

independent of the legal status of the perpetrator. Rebel organizations or governments are in principle both able to reach a high relative strength vis-a-vis their opponent (see e.g. D. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2013).

In sum, it seems possible to study the effects of government and non-government indiscriminate violence against civilians in one framework. For this it is not necessary to argue terrorism and government violence are exactly of the same kind or that governments and terrorist groups face similar constraints. However, I will proceed upon the assumption that when governments and nongovernment groups engage in the same type of indiscriminate violence this violence will produce similar effects. Conversely, this also means that for my purposes I will speak of terrorism only in the sense of indiscriminate violence against civilians. Therefore, in Chapter 3, I will only address the literature on terrorism that focuses on this type of violence and will seek to integrate government and nongovernment violence in Chapter 5.

The Effects of Violence

Another aspect that needs clarification concerns the *effects of violence*. Violence in general and group-selective violence in particular can have effects on several levels. For instance, violence could coerce the targeted population, it could lead to a moral backlash, or it could trigger an international intervention. These effects come about as violence signals or communicates implicit messages to different audiences.

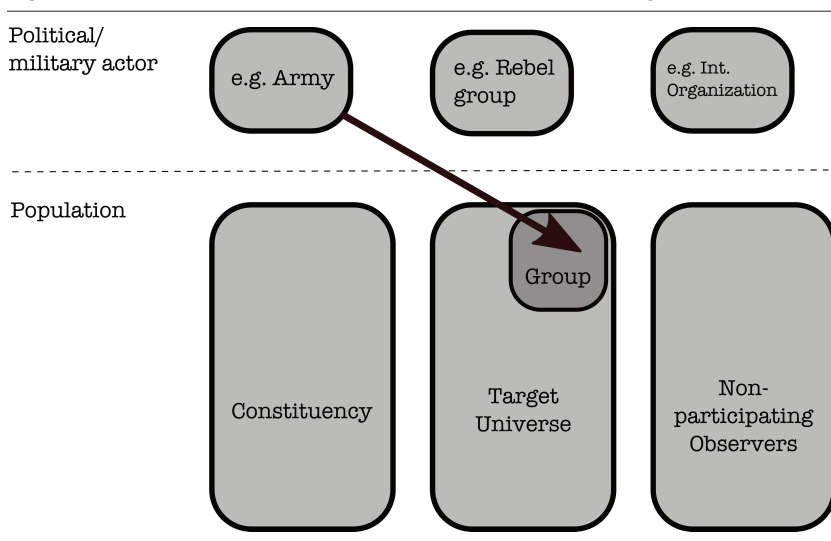
In order to clarify which effects I am concentrating on, I distinguish between three main audiences.⁵ I will present these audiences as ideal types here. But in reality, the concepts may be fluid.

The first audience is comprised by those who are directly impacted or could potentially be impacted by violence. When violence targets people in order to coerce, it targets some and threatens others. Violence and coercion thus concentrate on a domain of people who are actual and potential targets. For instance, in the case of Baranivka this would concern, among others, most villages in Ukraine. While the attack on Baranivka constituted one single event, it is clear that other villages in Ukraine could potentially suffer the same fate. For the sake of clarity, I will call this audience the *target universe*. Second, the perpetrator of violence usually has a *constituency* that under no circumstances will be targeted with indiscriminate violence. These are people who do not fall under the same targeting rule as the target audience and potentially support the actor who uses violence against civilians. For instance, in the Baranivka example this would be the German population within the boundaries of the core German Reich. Even if the Wehrmacht targeted more villages in Ukraine with group-selective violence, a German village would not.

However, violence can have other intentional and unintentional effects on this population as well. Since the constituency is closely connected to the perpetrator, the population can feel morally appalled that an actor that represents or claims to represent them is using violence against civilians. I will call this second audience the *constituency*. Third, beyond the constituency and the target universe other actors exist. These include among others all international actors and the sum of these actors can be seen as another audience. This audience is not included in the target universe and thus does not have to fear being targeted with violence. Neither is this audience directly connected to the perpetrator. For instance, the populations of other countries or international organizations which are not part of the conflict are often able to observe group-selective or indiscriminate violence to which they can then react. I will call this audience the *nonparticipating observers*. For an illustration see Figure 1.1.

In addition, all these audiences consist of A) a population as well as B) organizations (military or political) that represent or claim to represent them. For instance, in the case of the Baranivka massacre the target universe consists of the Ukrainian population. However, the military organizations in the background are various partisan groups that claim to fight for the Ukrainian people. In addition, the constituency is the German population but the military organization representing them is the Wehrmacht.

Figure 1.1 Three Audiences of Indiscriminate Violence Against Civilians



Such distinctions are important as the effects of indiscriminate violence on a population and military/political organizations may differ. It is also important since some of the arguments that I will review later make reference to the population while others refer to the organizations. However, as the exposure to violence and the preferences diverge between the population and the political representation, potential changes in behavior will be different, too. For instance, the partisans who hid in the wood near Baranivka may or may not have been concerned about the safety of civilians in that village. This, presumably, largely depended on their connection to the villagers and their own strategic considerations. However, the civilian population who were the target of the attack could not escape being concerned with attacks of this sort. As a future attack might target them, they will have been much more likely to adapt their behavior to avoid violence. A good general example of the dissociation between the preferences of an organization and the population is the widely used strategy of terrorists to provoke violence against their own constituency. In this case the population would prefer to not be attacked, but terrorist organizations benefit from these attacks. In fact, this strategy can be interpreted as a way to align the differing preferences of the population with those of the armed actor (see e.g. Lake, 2002).

In this book I will concentrate on the intentional and unintentional effects of violence on *the population of the target universe* and I have several good reasons for doing so. For purely practical reasons, it is not possible to concentrate on all effects of indiscriminate violence in one book. The literature on most effects has increased considerably and it is necessary to set clear boundaries for the analysis.

It is also generally accepted within the study of government and non-government violence that the main purpose of indiscriminate violence is to communicate with the target universe (e.g. Goodwin, 2006b, 2038, Kalyvas, 2006). The effects on other audiences are often merely unintentional side effects. In addition, the current controversy about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of indiscriminate violence is mainly focused on the target universe. Scholars within the government and the non-government violence literature are at loggerheads when it comes to the effects on the target audience, but mostly do not disagree on the potential effects on the other audiences.

In addition, I focus on the population instead of the military or political organizations. The reason for this is twofold. On the one hand, any type of effect of indiscriminate violence against civilians is more likely to be found among the civilian population itself. Since violence targets civilians and seeks to coerce them, the immediacy of violence can lead to direct behavioral changes while effects on military or political organizations need to be transmitted through the population. On the other hand, the current discus-

sion around the effectiveness of indiscriminate violence concerns the ability of this type of violence to have any positive effect for the perpetrator *at all*. As a consequence, in order to demonstrate that indiscriminate violence has an effect, it makes sense to concentrate on the population first. Later, additional research can then investigate how a behavioral change in the civilian population translates into behavioral change among organizations.

However, it has to be borne in mind that indiscriminate violence can have effects on both other audiences as well. With regard to the *constituency* various authors have pointed out potential effects. For government violence, it is often argued that employing indiscriminate violence against the opponent's population in a war might lead to increased resistance on the home front and ultimately to political defeat (e.g. Merom, 2003). Embarrassment can be a potent force. In fact, many case studies point to such a relationship. For instance, Townshend (2001) makes this connection for British violence during the Anglo-Irish War of 1919–1921 (Townshend, 2001, 351–355). In terrorism research, many authors make a similar observation. Some researchers argue that terrorism may alienate the constituency if violence is perceived as too brutal (e.g. Cronin, 2009, 348, Pape, 2003, 94), and De la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2013) find empirical support for this connection for ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) attacks on the Basque community in Spain.

However, others point out that the usage of terrorism can have a positive effect on the perpetrator's constituency as well (e.g. increase support). Violence may even be used for this reason. For instance, Karber (1971) differentiates between the instrumental and the affective effect of terrorism: instrumental effects produce the immediate coercive effect on the target universe while affective effects produce a change in the long-term support for the terrorists among the constituency (Karber, 1971, 528). Similarly, in an early book on the Algerian War of Independence, Hutchinson (1978) coined the term “endorsement terrorism” which describes a strategy of increasing support within the FLN's (Front de libération nationale) own constituency, the Algerian population in this case (Hutchinson, 1978, 145). Recently, this line of thought was taken up by Krause (2013), who argues that much of terrorist violence seeks to communicate to the constituency of the terrorists in order to increase support for the terrorist organization (Krause, 2013, 273).

With regard to the *nonparticipating observers*—those watching from afar—it is also reasonable to assume there may be both positive and negative effects. In studying government violence, multiple authors have pointed to the potential negative effects of indiscriminate violence for the perpetrator. As violence is banned under international laws, using indiscriminate violence can lead to increased international attention with the potential consequence of international isolation, sanctions, reduction of

financial aid or even outright military intervention (e.g. Arreguin-Toft, 2003; DeMeritt, 2012; Krain, 2012; Melander, 2009; Ron, 2003; Valentino, Huth, & Croco, 2006). However, particularly concerning nongovernment violence, many authors have pointed out that violence can generate the type of attention that is needed to produce international support. In fact, it seems to be one of the most highlighted facts in the terrorism literature that indiscriminate violence is able to increase the attention of the international community with potentially positive effects for the perpetrator (see e.g. Crenshaw, 1981, 386, Thornton, 2006, 50).

To recapitulate, I will exclude the effects of indiscriminate violence on the constituency and nonparticipating observers from this study and concentrate only on the potential effects on the population of the target universe. In order to study these particular effects I will follow most of the literature and take the viewpoint of the perpetrator. From this perspective, violence can have positive or negative effects for the perpetrator on the civilian population. Conversely, I will assume that the civilian population in principle has three options of behavior towards the perpetrator: support, resistance, and neutrality. Support and resistance can come in many forms. For instance, civilians could join the perpetrators' armed forces or the rebels' armed forces, they could provide information to either side or engage in low-scale violence against either side. Neutrality would mean that civilians try to have as few contacts as possible with both sides of the conflict. In addition to these three forms of behavior, civilians can have the option of fleeing the theater of war. Some of the approaches discussed later refer to this particular option. However, in this book I will exclude this type of behavior and assume that people cannot flee. This enables me to focus on behavioral changes that seem particularly paradoxical, such as previously resistant or neutral civilians shifting their behavior to support the perpetrator of indiscriminate violence.

Building on the previous literature, I identify three types of effects (which will be outlined in detail in Chapter 4) that potentially change the behavior of the civilian population: elimination, provocation and coercion.

1. Elimination is the most basic aspect of lethal violence. Lethal violence kills by definition. However, different types of targeting strategies kill different types of people. As demonstrated in the Baranivka example, group-selective violence seems to target the innocent. It therefore has a different elimination effect than say the assassination of a known collaborator which would kill an opponent and which would constitute selective violence.
2. The provocation effect makes civilians turn against the perpetrator and increases resistance among the civilian population. The resulting civilian behavior can take many forms, such as joining rebel forces,

using violence against the perpetrator, etc. Here, I identify three potential mechanisms that link indiscriminate violence with increased resistance which I will call: legitimacy, revenge and security. As I will discuss in further detail, revenge concerns emotional reactions to personal experiences of loss. In this case indiscriminate violence leads to increased resistance since people seek revenge for their loss. The legitimacy mechanism highlights the possibility that the usage of indiscriminate violence is morally so appalling that people will resist out of moral outrage. In addition, the security mechanism concentrates on the possibility that indiscriminate violence increases the perceived cost of staying neutral for the population. If indiscriminate violence is seen as random, people may perceive joining the rebellion as safer than staying out of it.

3. The coercion effect refers to the potential of indiscriminate violence to change the behavior of the population of the target universe. By threatening to punish a certain behavior, a perpetrator may be able to force the civilians into supporting him. A good amount of my discussion will concern this effect since currently only a few authors have devoted attention to the mechanisms that link indiscriminate violence with civilian support from the target universe.

Structure of the Book

From a methodological perspective this book is intended to construct and test a theory of the effects of group-selective violence against civilians. In this dual process, theory building seems particularly relevant. In 1995, Fearon wrote about the study of war: “The main theoretical task facing students of war is not to add to the already long list of arguments and conjectures but instead to take apart and reassemble these diverse arguments into a coherent theory fit for guiding empirical research” (Fearon, 1995, 382). I think the same is true for the study of indiscriminate violence against civilians. While empirical research in indiscriminate violence has increased steadily over the last years, the theoretical arguments have not been given a form that allows for an understanding of the countervailing positive and negative effects of this type of violence. Previous studies provide many important insights which I will highlight over the course of the book (e.g. Kalyvas, 2006; Schubiger, 2014; Douglass, 2012). However, I will reassemble and amend these arguments in order to construct a theory which can be tested.

I start by critically reviewing existing theories on government indiscriminate violence in Chapter 2 and on nongovernmental indiscriminate violence in Chapter 3. The separation of these two chapters is not entirely stringent, as some arguments are not restricted to just one side. However,

the separation is a major fault-line within the literature and, therefore, it makes sense to discuss both sides individually. These chapters are not designed as a mere narration of existing approaches. Instead, I want to engage in a process of consolidation and creative reconstruction of the literature. By pointing to some of the apparent weaknesses and potential strengths of existing approaches, the chapters will highlight the ways forward that are worth pursuing.

Going systematically through the theoretical arguments for the positive view (i.e., violence can be beneficial for the perpetrator) and the negative view (i.e., violence is detrimental) on indiscriminate violence, I distill several key insights. First, the negative view on indiscriminate violence can be split up into arguments on the ineffectiveness of violence (violence cannot reach its intended goal) and the counterproductiveness of violence (violence produces unintentional side-effects). On the one side, I will argue that the arguments on the ineffectiveness of indiscriminate violence are only valid for violence that is perceived as random. Here the often wrongly made equation between violence against groups and violence that is perceived as random is a particular problem.

On the other side, arguments on counterproductive effects mostly seem to be highly plausible. I will identify especially three relevant mechanisms within the literature that connect indiscriminate violence with counterproductive effects: legitimacy, revenge and security.

Secondly, the positive view has recently gained strength in the literature on governmental violence. Some authors argue that indiscriminate violence can have a coercive effect. However, these authors do not explain how violence can lead to coercion or how the negative effects and the positive effects interact. As it is plausible that indiscriminate violence produces counterproductive effects, it remains unclear under what circumstances the coercive effect might outweigh the negative effects.

This leaves us with three major obstacles for progress in understanding the effects of violence: 1) the conflation between different types of violence necessitates an improved categorization of types of violence that focuses on the effects and the perception of violence; 2) the way indiscriminate violence is able to coerce needs additional theorization; and 3) the countervailing effects of violence need to be brought into a single framework in order to study an overall effect.

In Chapter 4, I address the three obstacles identified in Chapters 2 and 3, as overcoming them is the necessary precondition for building a theory on group-selective violence. I introduce a new categorization of violence. In particular, I distinguish between two targeting strategies, selective and group-selective violence, and violence that has no targeting pattern, arbitrary violence. I also review the concept of coercion and outline how violence against civilians can be coercive. I distinguish between two types of coercive strate-

gies: in the first strategy an actor seeks to coerce one target with violence (specific) and in the second strategy an actor seeks to coerce an audience by using exemplary violence against a target (general). Finally, I introduce a conceptualization of the effects of violence, which highlights that violence has simultaneously counterproductive (provocative) as well as positive effects and points out criteria under which the respective effect should be strong.

In Chapter 5, I introduce my theoretical argument on the effects of group-selective violence. The theory is founded on rational choice assumptions and, therefore, explicitly outlines the preferences and incentives for the perpetrators of violence and the individuals within the target universe. This allows me to show that group-selective violence has a distinct set of effects on the groups and individuals within the target universe.

Importantly, building on the insights of the previous chapter, I distinguish between two types of group-selective targeting strategies. On the one hand, an actor may focus narrowly upon the group itself. Simply, it targets a specific group in order to coerce it. I call this type of targeting *specific group-selective violence*. On the other hand, an actor might take a wider field of vision. It can target one group in order to coerce *other groups* more generally. I term this type of targeting *general group-selective violence*. While the first type of strategy is the model that most researchers seem implicitly to have in mind, I show that it is the second strategy that has the most potential to produce a positive net-effect for the perpetrator.

In addition, I discuss the effects of specific group-selective violence and general group-selective violence and demonstrate that the potential positive effect of the former is much lower than the latter.

Finally, although violence is targeted against groups I do not remain at the group-level for my explanations. The standard view among rational choice theorists is that individual rationality often does not translate into group behavior (Geddes, 2003, 194–198). As a consequence, it is important to base the theory in methodological individualism and show that individual rationality can translate into the expected group-behavior.

In sum, the theory reconciles the previously theorized positive and negative effect of indiscriminate violence. By introducing two different types of strategies, specific and general group-selective violence, the theory is also able to point out why researchers may observe both unsuccessful and successful group-selective violence.

The second part of the book is devoted to the empirical investigation of general group-selective violence (Chapters 6–8). In these chapters I concentrate on general group-selective violence as it is the strategy that most likely produces recognizable coercive effects. Since the current debate about indiscriminate violence mainly focuses on whether indiscriminate violence can be effective in coercing at all, it makes sense to focus on likely cases, to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of group-selective violence.

In Chapter 6, I review the empirical findings on indiscriminate violence. This demonstrates that the problems identified in the theoretical literature have translated into problems with empirical strategies. However, it also shows that some authors have investigated group-selective violence, more or less without realizing that the phenomenon is different from selective violence or arbitrary violence. Interestingly, some of these findings already support the theory of group-selective violence.

In Chapter 7, I discuss several historical cases of general group-selective violence. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it is intended as a plausibility probe of the theory of general group-selective violence (Eckstein, 2000). Since the coercive effect of general group-selective violence has not been described as a generalizable effect, it makes sense to demonstrate how violence is used and what effects it seems to have in a set of diverse cases. Second, the chapter is intended to demonstrate the broad range of applications of general group-selective violence. Here it is particularly helpful to use historical cases as perpetrators tended to be much more outspoken about their strategies in earlier time periods. With the advent of international law, this willingness seems more and more reduced although the usage of group-selective violence appears to continue.

I outline that cities, villages, tribes, and families have all been the target of general group-selective violence. In all contexts, perpetrators expect the coercive effects of violence will outweigh the negative effects, they seek to communicate their strategy to the target universe and they are willing to accept some negative consequences. In addition, the review of these cases provides some limited, anecdotal evidence of realized coercive effects. In most cases some indication can be found that violence increases support for the perpetrator. As a consequence, the cases can give additional plausibility to the possibility that general group-selective violence is used regularly for its coercive effects.

In Chapter 8, the theory of general group-selective violence is tested with macro-data on recent ethnic conflicts and ethnic groups. Transferring the theory of general group-selective violence to multi-ethnic countries and building on the work of Toft (2003) and Walter (2009), I argue that violence is used in civil wars to deter other ethnic groups from rebelling. I use data on civil wars from the Uppsala conflict data program (UCDP) and the Ethnic Power Relations dataset (EPR) in a statistical analysis. I first test whether violence against civilians is used more often in cases where the incentives to do so are higher. Given the discussion of the theory, it should be expected that group-selective violence increases when more groups are present that could be coerced. I also directly investigate whether violence against civilians leads to fewer rebellions. The findings further support the idea that group-selective violence is used in many circumstances and a part of many recent conflicts.

In Chapter 9, I summarize my findings, discuss some limitations and draw several conclusions. All evidence taken together, I argue, this book provides support for the notion that group-selective violence can be effective in coercing.

The findings of the book also pose an apparent moral dilemma. By finding that violence can be beneficial for a perpetrator it may seem that the book could—in the wrong hands—be used to improve repression by the ruthless. While this may be a natural first impression, I show over the course of the book that it is not the case. After all, perpetrators of group-selective violence exist already in abundance and they use violence against civilians in large amounts. As this book demonstrates, these perpetrators know about the potential positive effects of violence for them and pursue their ruthless strategies precisely because they work. However, this knowledge is not present among many of the researchers and practitioners who seek to counter violence and improve the lives of civilians in civil wars. Therefore, in a way this book is an effort to level the playing field. It is meant to produce equality of knowledge between perpetrators who use violence for their benefit and those who seek to counter violence. For the latter it is of the utmost importance to understand violence in order to fight it.

Notes

1. For a detailed description of this incident see T. Anderson (1999). I will come back to the Baranivka example in Chapter 7.

2. Separating the literature on violence against civilians in these two categories (government and nongovernment violence) of course cannot do justice to all approaches. However, it can be seen as a pervasive trend that violence is studied separately. The reason for this seems to be that most authors focus on the causes of violence and less on the effects of violence. As a consequence, they emphasize the organizational differences between rebels and governments instead of looking for similar effects.

3. However, there are some exceptions to this general trend as, for instance, the literature on state terrorism, e.g. Stohl (1984), Stohl & Lopez (1986), Gurr (1986), Blakeley (2009), and Jackson, Murphy & Poynting (2009) and part of the literature on rebel group violence, e.g. Hultman (2007).

4. Other definitions that do not concentrate on civilians can be found for instance in English (2016), Neumann and Smith (2005), and Sandler (2003). A good overview of different kinds of definitions is provided by Schmid (2011). Schmid points out in his review of definitions of terrorism that slightly more than one third of academics agree that violence against civilians is a defining criterion for terrorism (Schmid, 2011, 76).

5. Others differentiate audiences even further. For instance, Schmid distinguishes ten target audiences (Schmid, 2005, 135). However, I would argue that the three audiences I am covering here are the most important ones.