

# Book Review

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*Organized Violence after Civil War: The Geography of Recruitment in Latin America.* By Sarah Zukerman Daly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

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Why do some violent organizations choose to disarm and demilitarize following peace negotiations, while others in the same country at the same time choose to remilitarize and resume violence instead? Sarah Zukerman Daly's new book tackles that question using a rigorous, multi-method research design and exhaustive (and brave) fieldwork among the drug-dealing, right-wing, formerly (and not-so-formerly) violent militias of Colombia. Her book both builds on and challenges many leading works in the subfield of civil war termination, with a set of parsimonious hypotheses that are generalizable to many other contexts.

Daly's research design is almost textbook-like in its precision, and that alone makes this book useful for anyone interested in the comparative politics of violence. She begins with a well-defined causal question and clear variation in outcomes: 37 major right-wing militias signed peace accords with the Álvaro Uribe government in Colombia from 2003 to 2004, and roughly half of them chose to remilitarize within the next five years, while the other half did not. Drawing on the bargaining and information theory of war, as well as the literature on networks and organizational theory, Daly develops a set of original hypotheses to explain this variation. Those militias that rely on local recruitment, she argues, will both be more cohesive and have better information about their own capabilities and the surrounding environment than those who recruit nationally because their social networks will be stronger and more enduring. Locally recruited groups are likely to stay in place at war's end, to have deep and continuing social ties to each other, and to have good knowledge about the situation of groups that immediately surround them. Nationally recruited groups will scatter after negotiations, and their leaders will find their subordinates' reports less trustworthy because they have fewer socially connected

sources of reliable information to check those reports against. As a result, locally recruited groups surrounded by other locally recruited groups will have more confidence that power balances remain unchanged and stronger incentives to demilitarize in sync (even as they likely retain political and economic control in their home areas). Nationally recruited groups will face more uncertainty about how their own members will behave in the post-war order, and they will trust information about surrounding groups less. Hence, they will be more likely to break the agreements and remilitarize, but they will be relatively ineffective at doing so given their scattered and weakly connected membership. Locally recruited groups that are next door to nationally recruited groups will also perceive a need to remilitarize given the uncertainty in their environment, but they will do so much more effectively than nationally recruited groups because of their social cohesion and trust.

To test these hypotheses, Daly conducted hundreds of semi-structured interviews with militia commanders, rank-and-file members, government officials, civil society representatives, and ordinary people who were victims of militia violence. She constructed a series of original databases using information from Colombian intelligence, police, and prison organizations and think tanks, as well as from the Organization of American States (OAS) Peace Mission. She carried out 11 original surveys over a decade, gained access to confidential depositions given by commanders as part of the peace process, and did content analysis of the militias' own records and 10 Colombian newspapers. She presents her findings statistically, as well as visually in a number of tables and district maps, and then explores the findings and anomalies through in-depth case studies of particular militias and regions.

Throughout Daly is careful to test alternative hypotheses and to recognize the unavoidable limits (especially related to selection bias and to the unknowability of long-term outcomes) that confront any researcher in a violent context. Daly finds that her hypotheses correctly explain a whopping 31 of

the 37 cases of militia behavior in Colombia. She believes that in large part the remaining cases are explained by a contagion effect from nearby, but not immediately neighboring, geographical areas. Daly discovers something else that is fascinating: militia commanders were not very prescient in their strategic thinking vis-à-vis the government, and they sometimes ended up kicking themselves for giving in too easily when in retrospect they could have gotten a better deal.

There is really only one weakness in the plan of the book, and it is minor: Daly's research is so rich and detailed that it is sometimes difficult for someone who does not already know the facts and names to follow all of the stories about individual militias. I found myself wishing that the book were color-coded by militia throughout. Some of the clarity of the initial arguments seemed a bit muddled by the case studies in later chapters.

There is also a potential weakness in generalizability that Daly seems to have missed. For whatever reason, the peace

deals worked as well as they did in Colombia because militia commanders cared about public opinion. Daly shows that they bowed both to pressure from international public opinion and from a democratically mobilized voting public at home. Incentives stemming from each of those factors might be necessary conditions for any demobilization to occur among powerful militias—and that might leave less hope for Daly's theory to apply to a Libya, a Syria, or an Afghanistan, with a less developed civil society.

Overall, however, *Organized Violence after Civil War* is a convincing book that is destined to be on the syllabus of virtually every graduate-level political science course on civil war and every reading list for related comprehensive exams. I hope that Daly will also distill her findings into a policy journal article for the general public and a short memorandum for policy makers beyond Colombia and the OAS; the book's relevance to crucial problems in international security reverberates far beyond the ivory tower.