

DEFENSE STUDIES

**Organized Violence
after Civil War**The Geography of Recruitment
in Latin America

Sarah Zukerman Daly

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**Organized Violence after Civil War: The
Geography of Recruitment in Latin America**

By Sarah Zukerman Daly

Reviewed by Dr. R. Evan Ellis, research professor for Latin America and the Caribbean for the US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute

Internal conflict and violence in Colombia is one of the most extensively covered topics in Latin American studies. The mixed criminal and political nature of the combatants and the associated processes of peace and demobilization are some of the most polemical topics in the discipline. In the present context, the controversial 2016 agreement between the Colombian government and representatives of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to demobilize, and the ongoing negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) to do the same lends importance to understanding the conditions under which such processes succeed or fail. For this reason, Sarah Zukerman Daly's excellent study of the factors driving remobilization and the return to violence of Colombian armed groups demobilized from 2003–6 is both important and timely.

Daly's book is an outstanding work of political science, effectively integrating quantitative methods with a detailed comparative analysis of cases, extensive field research, and a demonstrated deep knowledge of her subject. The work makes a significant contribution to our understanding of Colombia, the dynamics of internal conflict, and the determinants of successful outcomes in conflict resolution between groups.

At its core, Daly's work argues social networks are more important than other factors such as group character or access to resources in determining whether demobilized groups in an armed conflict will reconstitute their military structures and return to violence. She maintains the critical factor is the local versus nonlocal basis of the group's recruitment. In her analysis of the 37 paramilitary groups demobilized in Colombia by agreement with the government from 2003–6, Daly finds that, while nonlocal recruitment did not necessarily make groups less effective on the battlefield (e.g. the nonlocally recruited Catatumbo block, prior to its demobilization, was highly capable militarily relative to other groups), nonlocal groups dispersed from the zone of operation after the agreement (often to their areas of origin) more than their locally recruited counterparts, reducing the influence of the group and its ability to remobilize, while also impairing communications and preventing commanders from adequately assessing the changed situation of the group in the face of subsequent incentives remobilize.

Daly finds that, regardless of other factors such as the character of the group (e.g. criminal versus ideological motivations), in areas dominated by locally recruited groups, following demobilization, group organizational coherence declined less rapidly, and former leaders retained a clearer

understanding of the group situation and balance of power, helping to avoid remobilization and return to violence driven by miscalculations.

By contrast, where one or more of the militias was primarily nonlocal, the erosion of group power, combined with the increased possibility of miscalculation regarding the balance of power and group's ability to reconstitute itself, made remobilization and renewed violence more likely. Impressively, Daly's parsimonious theory accurately predicts remobilization in 31 of the 37 cases examined.

Daly's effective integration of solid quantitative analysis with detailed case studies is particularly impressive. On the quantitative side, Daly employs numerous databases from the Colombian government, transnational, and nongovernmental organizations, as well as her own field surveys, and the use of her own expert knowledge and external authorities to categorize group characteristics and geographically located events. She creatively uses the geolocation of data on groups, events, and individual combatants to make credible data-based conclusions regarding local versus nonlocal groups.

Daly takes the time to explain the origins and calculation of her results, and walks the reader through the exploration of alternate hypotheses in a manner that is credible without being excessively technical for those who are not experts in statistics and other quantitative methods.

Her qualitative analysis is equally impressive as an example of the power and correct application of the comparative method. The cases that she examines in-depth, the Bloque Cacique Nutibara in Medellín, the Bloque Catatumbo, and the Bloque Elmer Cardenas, skillfully cover the three major permutations of her analysis (all groups locally recruited, all groups nonlocally recruited, and a mixed case). Daly's narrative maintains its focus on the key variables of her theory, while giving the reader a feel for the detailed context and why each situation unfolded as it did, including effectively placed quotes from conflict participants, and other demonstrations of insight gained through the local commanders, militia members, and community members she has interviewed.

If her analysis has a weakness, it is the relative lack of attention, outside of her case study chapters, to the FARC and ELN as key players in the conflict dynamics where they were operating.

While Daly's work does not explicitly touch upon the 2016 agreement between the Santos government and the FARC in Colombia, it suggests several hypotheses regarding future prospects. In the cases examined by Daly, social and political pressures ultimately led the Colombian government away from the "deal" that the paramilitary leaders expected when they entered talks, ultimately contributing to the imperatives for their remobilization.

In the current context, the economic and political difficulties of the Colombian government in fulfilling promises regarding land reform, crop substitution programs, the development of remote areas, and transitional justice potentially create similar pressures for groups to remobilize or metamorphize into new types of extralegal entities. Daly's work suggests that, in the context of such problems, different FARC fronts and blocks are likely to respond differently, based in part

on the local or nonlocal origins of their own combatants, in ways that the Colombian government can prepare for.

Daly's work also finds the availability of resources from criminal enterprises does not play a determining role in remobilization and violence. Indeed, in her case studies, she notes that groups can appropriate criminal income without reconstructing former military structures. Thus, as coca production in Colombia continues to grow with no prospect for the resumption of aerial glyphosate spraying, Daly's work ironically suggests criminal groups could significantly expand their influence over the Colombian state, even while violence declines and Colombian politicians laud the success of the peace process.

Organized Violence after Civil Wars is a must-read for both scholars and policymakers far beyond Colombia and Latin America, insofar as that the permanence of demobilization by armed groups is fundamental to the success of negotiated settlements in a broad array of countries. This work contains generalizable, data-based insights potentially relevant as a tool to anticipate areas of risk in those cases, and to manage the survival of the peace.



America's Digital Army: Games at Work and War

By Robertson Allen

Reviewed by Robert J. Bunker, adjunct research professor, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College

Written by Robertson Allen—an ethnographer with expertise in digital games, war, and violence—*America's Digital Army: Games at Work and War* is part of the *Anthropology of Contemporary North America* series published by University of Nebraska Press. Foremost an academic and theoretical work hailing from the field of anthropological cultural studies, game studies and Marxist influences are also evident. Additionally, the book presents a case study and offers a descriptive narrative that is more military professional in its orientation.

The book focuses upon the *America's Army* project (later *Army Game Project*) that ran from July 2002 (the original online game release) to roughly June 2009 (the release of the third version). The book is intertwined with research themes and arguments related to the proposition “that digital games and simulations act as channels for enlisting and militarizing immaterial labor” and “that virtual soldiering is central to how contemporary US military institutions exert power over individuals” (36, 163). The underlying ethnographic research (utilizing field sites immersion, data collection, and analysis) was partially funded by the National Science Foundation, along with some additional academic support, as well as the cooperation of elements of the US Army and many of the game designers and programmers involved with the *America's Army* and derivative projects themselves, which was initially approved by the project director, Casey Wardynski, at the United States Military Academy, West Point.

The case study related to *America's Army (AA)/Army Game Project* is a fascinating one and is uniquely facilitated by the author's association

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