

Large-scale collective group violence

This month, we bring you information about the structural aspects of large-scale collective violence. This issue is part of ongoing work at the ISN to produce an ISN Dossier on 'Large-Scale Collective Group Violence'. This dossier will include analysis of psychological theories and research on collective violence as well as a comprehensive overview of relevant work from political science, psychology and other disciplines to understand this type of crime against humanity.

1.1 What is collective violence

Collective violence, the World Health Organization states, is "the instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives." This newsletter deals with incidents of genocide, political massacres (politicide), and large-scale massacres - differentiated from genocide by lacking the *intent* to kill the target group in whole. Collective violence can include additional events such as war, terrorism and abuses of human rights such as mass repression, large-scale disappearances, and widespread torture or rape.

1.2 Collective violence causes

On 4 October 1943, Heinrich Himmler, commander of the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS), gave a speech to senior SS officers in Poznan, Poland. During the speech, he described that the "extermination of the Jewish people" is a "moral right" which the SS "had the duty to our people to do [...] to kill these people who wanted to kill us." The Holocaust was neither the first nor the last time one group has sought the extermination of another; today some have argued that there are no less than 20 active genocides occurring. Numerous scholarly fields, ranging from psychology to anthropology to philosophy to geography, have tried to understand these types of events. Political science has also attempted to understand the dynamics of genocide, politicide and large-scale massacres. Here is some of what they have found:

Political scientist and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Committee on Conscience member Barbara Harff states that "all episodes of genocide and political mass murder of the last half-century have been carried out by elites or rival authorities in the context of internal war and regime instability." She has shown that the following six variables have a postdict accuracy of 74 percent in differentiating the 35 cases of genocide, politicide and large-scale massacres, which accompanied internal war and regime change, from the 126 instances of "limited" to only internal war and regime collapse between 1955 and 1997. The variables are: prior upheaval excluding prior

genocides (such as civil war), prior genocide, ideological orientation of ruling elite is exclusionary, regime type is an autocracy, ethnic character of ruling elite represents an ethnic minority, and the regime has low trade openness. Of these, autocratic regimes and an exclusionary ideology or elites who represent an ethnic minority have the highest probability of mass murder.[1]

Others argue that although genocide, politicide and large-scale massacres have typically occurred within the context of internal war and regime collapse years since World War II, mass violence of the sort considered here, does not require this to occur. Furthermore, genocide, politicide and large-scale massacres should not be equated with war or considered synonymous, although they have frequently occurred in tandem.[2]

In an effort to build a robust early warning system for humanitarian emergencies, research suggests that there are nineteen separate variables that provide a risk assessment model for genocide, politicide and large-scale massacres. They can be broken down into four categories: international background conditions – which include global political alliances, reaction to political upheaval, and economic status of the regime - internal background conditions - such as the level of democracy, and strength and number of separate group identities. The third category deals with structural changes to the background conditions, plus adds political developments and relative economic prosperity shifts. Finally, the fourth category deals with accelerators that increase the effect of the background conditions and are short in duration – such as specific incidents of violence or conflict spill over other regional conflicts.[3]

Economic factors leading to civil wars and regime collapse, which as Harff noted have occurred with or prior to genocide, politicide, and large-scale massacres, have been well documented. They include “dependence on primary commodity exports, low average incomes, slow growth and large diasporas.” One study focusing on the sources of humanitarian emergencies suggests that stagnation, declining real gross domestic product (GDP), high military expenditures to GDP, a tradition of violence, high-income inequality and slow growth in food production can precipitate humanitarian emergencies; genocide, politicide and massacres fall under this heading.[4]

Recognizing that “phenomena such as war, civil war, state-sponsored mass murder and state terrorism” are all highly related, and often indistinguishable from one another, another author has attempted to understand what best predicts the onset and severity of genocide, politicide and large-scale massacres. It was found that “openings in the political opportunity structure” best predict the “onset of genocides or politicides.” These openings come most often from civil war involvement and are even more salient when combined with any one or more of the following: war, extraconstitutional changes, decolonization, ethnic fractionalisation, marginalization and significant power concentrations. The role of bystanders, both domestic and international, has an impact on the severity of the event.[5]

Political science has elucidated a number of particular potential causes and anticipated preconditions required for genocide, politicide and large-scale massacres to occur. In all instances discussed here, intra-state violence and unrest is an element which consistently factors into the type of collective violence considered. Exclusivist political or ethnic ideology factors in as well, plus the marginalization of some group within the system.

What political science models fail to account for is how Gitera Rwamuhuzi – a Rwandan who was interviewed for a BBC special commemorating the Rwandan genocide – can state that he is unable to fathom how he was able to “butcher people for no reason.” The only explanation he gives is that he “had been attacked by the devil.” The ISN Dossier on ‘Large-Scale Collective Group Violence’ will bring at least some understanding to events that have killed, according to some estimates, more than four times the number of people killed in all wars combined in the last 100 years, as it will consider genocide, politicide, and large-scale massacres from numerous vantage points and fields of inquiry.

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1.3 Libraries and information sources

CRInfo: Genocide Directory

CRInfo provides a dynamic listing of research and a large link library on a wide range of research related to genocide and large scale massacres.

Genocide Studies Program at Yale University

The Genocide Studies Program at Yale University conducts research, seminars and conferences on comparative, interdisciplinary, and policy issues relating to the phenomenon of genocide, and provides training to researchers from afflicted regions.

United States Institute for Peace Research – The Genocide Convention at Fifty Resource Page

The United States Institute for Peace Research resource page on the Genocide Convention provides information on courts and tribunals, genocide studies and projects, and selected documents related to the convention.

University of Minnesota Human Rights Library

This library houses one of the largest collections of core human rights documents, including treaties and other primary sources. The site includes large links directory, and has resources available in numerous language.

Web Genocide Documentation Centre

The resources from this site focus on some of the most important twentieth-century genocidal and mass man-made killing occurrences. A major emphasis is on the provision of primary materials relating to these events.

UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

This website contains the text of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which entered into force on 12 January 1951.

1.4 Research and academia

Centre for International Development and Conflict Management

The Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) is seeks to bridge between theory and practice, academics and activism, economic development and civil society, technology and human needs. The projects of CIDCM seek to understanding the dynamics of conflict and conflict resolution, with a special emphasis on the role of economic development and information technology in conflict-prone societies. CIDCM expertises in data collection and analysis.

Institute for the Study of Genocide (ISG) - International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS). The Institute for the Study of Genocide (ISG) is an independent nonprofit organization that exists to promote and disseminate scholarship and policy analyses on the causes, consequences, and prevention of genocide. The International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) is a global, interdisciplinary, non-partisan organization that seeks to further research and teaching about the nature, causes, and consequences of genocide, and advance policy studies on prevention of genocide. The aim of the Association is to draw colleagues from different disciplines into an interdisciplinary conversation.

Montreal Institute for Genocide Studies

The Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies collects and disseminates knowledge about the historical origins of mass killings through research, teaching, workshops, conferences, and publications. This website offers paper series, articles, a bibliography, Holocaust survivor memoirs, events information, and links.

Minorities at Risk Project

The Minorities at Risk (MAR) Project is a research project that monitors and analyzes the status and conflicts of politically-active communal groups in all countries with a current population of at least 500,000. The project provides information in a standardized format for comparative research. It is designed for researchers, public officials, journalists, students, activists, and others interested in the topic.

United States Holocaust Memorial Mesuem

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a leading source of information, databases, and research on the Holocaust. Also provides a range of information on other genocide situations. Has a picture library and links directory.

United States Institute for Peace Research: The Genocide Convention at 50

Written by Prof. William Schabas, senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace, and published by the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, this brief report considers the major issues confronting the genocide convention as it enters the twenty-first century.

1.5 Selected journals

Journal of Genocide Research

The Journal of Genocide Research promotes an interdisciplinary and comparative approach to the study of genocide. It is designed to serve as an international forum for a broad spectrum of scholars: theologians, philosophers, jurists, moralists, ethicists, political scientists and, of course, historians. Given the contemporary resurgence of extreme ethnic conflict throughout the world. The Journal will allot considerable space to potential genocide danger as well as to the serious problems it poses politicians, diplomats, and policy makers who seek to predict and prevent genocide. The website offers tables of contents, abstracts, and subscription information. Subscription required to access full-text articles.

Journal of Holocaust and Genocide Studies

The major forum for scholarship on the Holocaust and other genocides, Holocaust and Genocide Studies is an international journal featuring research articles, interpretive essays, and book reviews in the social sciences and humanities. It is the principal publication to address the issue of how insights into the Holocaust apply to other genocides. The website offers tables of contents, abstracts, and subscription information. Subscription required to access full-text articles.

1.6 Non-governmental organizations

Aegis Trust

The Aegis trust conducts research, policy work, education, awareness and victims support in the area of genocide events. The Aegis Trust works with a wide range of partners, including governmental, non-governmental, educational and academic institutions around the world.

Freedom, Democide, War

Based on the writings and research of Rudolf Rummel, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Hawaii, this site considers numerous theories and statistical approaches to the analysis of the causes of genocide and events of mass murder.

Genocide Intervention Network

The Genocide Intervention Network works to create a world in which the global community is willing and able to protect civilians from genocide and mass atrocities. Its mission is to empower individuals and communities with the tools to prevent and stop genocide.

Genocide Research Project

The Genocide Research Project (GRP) is a collaborative effort of scholars to encourage socio-legal research on genocide and other crimes against humanity. It is designed to build a long term research agenda with the intent of understanding and preventing genocide.

Gendercide Watch

Gendercide Watch seeks to confront acts of gender-selective mass killing around the world. The organisation works to raise awareness, conduct research, and produce educational resources on gendercide.

Prevent Genocide International

Prevent Genocide International is an organization with the purpose of bringing about the elimination of the crime of genocide. The organization seeks to create a transnational network of global civic engagement and action.

Citations

- [1] Harff, Barbara (2003), 'No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955,' *American Political Science Review*, 97(1).
- [2] Bartorp, Paul (2002), 'The relationship between war and genocide in the twentieth century: a consideration,' *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4(4).
- [3] Harff, Barbara, and Gurr, Ted (1998), 'Systemic Early Warning in Humanitarian Emergencies,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 135(5).
- [4] Auvinen, Juha, and Nafziger, Wayne (1999), 'The Sources of Humanitarian Emergencies,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43(3).
- [5] Krain, Matthew (1997), 'State-Sponsored Mass Murder: The Onset and Severity of Genocides and Politicides,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41(3).