
Deadly Communities: Local Political Milieus and the Persecution of Jews in Occupied Poland

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Abstract

Why, after the outbreak of World War II in Eastern Europe, did the inhabitants of some communities erupt in violence against their Jewish neighbors? The authors hypothesize that the greater the degree of preexisting intercommunal polarization between Jews and the titular majority group, the more likely a pogrom. They test this proposition using an original data set of matched census and electoral returns from interwar Poland. Where Jews supported ethnic parties that advocated minority cultural autonomy, the local populations perceived the Jews as an obstacle to the creation of nation-states in which minorities acknowledged the right of the titular majority to impose its culture across a country's entire territory. These communities became toxic. Where determined state elites could politically integrate minorities, pogroms were far less likely to occur. The results point to the theoretical importance of political assimilation and are also consistent with research that extols the virtues of interethnic civic engagement.

Keywords

riots, pogroms, violence, Poland, World War II, ethnic politics, assimilation, indifference

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Two tragedies befell the Jews of Eastern Europe after the outbreak of World War II. The first and by far the best known and exhaustively researched is the Nazi extermination effort. The second, as Żbikowski (1993, p. 174) eloquently puts it, is “the violent explosion of the latent hatred and hostility of local communities.” This article focuses on the second tragedy, a wave of pogroms that broke out in the aftermath of the 1941 Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union across a broad swath of territory stretching from roughly the Baltic to the Black Seas. It seeks to identify the political features of local communities that led some to erupt in violence against their Jewish neighbors but others to remain quiescent. Why were some communities toxic for Jews and others relatively benign?

We hypothesize that the greater the degree of intercommunal polarization between Jews and the titular majority group, the more likely a pogrom. Where Jews supported ethnic parties that advocated minority cultural autonomy, the local populations perceived the Jews as being insufficiently willing to integrate into society and thus an obstacle to the creation of nation-states in which minorities acknowledged the right of the titular majority to impose its culture across a country’s entire territory. The belief that Jews lay outside the community of solidarity had already produced some anti-Jewish violence even before the war broke out. When war finally did come opportunities for violence soared. The local populations were less likely to protect their Jewish neighbors from external depredation and more likely to commit acts of aggression themselves.

Our geographic focus is Poland, and in particular the northeastern Białystok and Łomża regions. There are good reasons for this. From a methodological perspective, we believe that to gain traction on the causes of ethnic violence it is important to “scale down” below the cross-national level (Scacco, 2008; Varshney, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004). Empirically there is a great deal of variation in pogrom occurrence across localities, and no explanation of ethnic violence is complete without some accounting for these observed patterns. Yet municipality-level explanations are often challenging because of the dearth of available information—episodes of ethnic violence occurring outside the larger towns may be underreported, and the data to test alternative hypotheses are often lacking. To overcome this problem we capitalize on a rancorous debate among historians concerning one particularly vicious pogrom that occurred in the same region during the same time period in the town of Jedwabne (Gross, 2001, 2002; Henning, 2001; Polonsky & Michlic, 2004 [AQ: 1]; Sulek, 2001). As Gross (2001) sums it up, in one day in July 1941, some 1,600 Jews were killed in Jedwabne when the Polish half of the town killed the Jewish half.¹ Historians have challenged nearly every aspect of Gross’s account, and as a

consequence there has been an outpouring of research on Jedwabne and the regions surrounding it. Our database of pogroms builds on the work of Gross, Żbikowski, and others who have initiated the painstaking task of reconstructing for a dense network of neighboring localities the circumstances under which pogroms occurred from June to August 1941 as the German army swept through eastern Poland on the trail of the retreating Soviet army.

The article is broken up into five sections. In the next section we discuss competing explanations for the pogroms. In the third section we describe the data. Our emphasis on the general ethno-national and political features of the localities where pogroms took place has necessitated making certain simplifying assumptions, which we describe and justify. The fourth section compares localities where pogroms took place to places where they did not take place. We find that the greater the proportion of Jews supporting parties advocating cultural autonomy, the greater the probability of a pogrom. In the fifth section we provide additional evidence for the importance of intercommunal polarization and illustrate the mix of motives and emotions at work with testimony from one pogrom. We show that in localities where minorities could be politically integrated by determined state elites, pogroms were far less likely to occur.

Explaining Pogroms

In his classic essay on Jewish life in pre–World War II Eastern Europe, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1946) tells of a pogrom wave in 1917 where “a certain town directly in the path of the passing hordes had in the various pogrom waves been persistently spared” (p. 100). His account suggests divine intervention. We prefer the methods of modern social science and begin by defining terms. The often contested and contradictory accounts of what happened in particular localities necessitate a minimalist approach to classifying pogroms. Although we appreciate the importance of issues such as determining whether civilian perpetrators acted alone or at the request or demand of the German authorities, in practice this is difficult if not impossible to reconstruct for all pogroms. Thus, for purposes of this article a pogrom is defined as a collective attack on Jews that is geographically limited in scope and in which there is participation by civilian groups. Researchers sometimes distinguish between pogroms, which are planned and often supported by the political authorities, and riots, which are said to be spontaneous and committed without the state’s foreknowledge. Certainly as in regard to the wave of ethnic violence under study here we agree with Brass (2006, p. 3) that no empirically meaningful distinction can be made between the two.

Drawing on Kalyvas (2006), we argue that pogroms are most likely to occur where preexisting intercommunal polarization is highest. Kalyvas's conceptualization of polarization is clear and worth quoting: "Polarization can be conceptualized as the sum of antagonisms between individuals belonging to a small number of groups that simultaneously display high internal homogeneity and high external heterogeneity" (p. 63).² One can conceive of a level of polarization approaching zero where two sets of individuals feel so bound to each other that the community can be said to exist only in the presence of both. Conversely, it is possible to conceive of complete polarization, a situation in which individuals feel so unbound to each other that the fate of both is at best a matter of mutual indifference. The deeper this cleavage, the more likely pogroms are to occur.

There is little question whether Poles and Jews were already polarized before the outbreak of the Second World War. Divided by religion and language, often enough that each group also occupied different economic niches and social strata and passed down among themselves the "sins" of the other group (Golczewski, 1981; Michlic, 2006). On the Polish side such differences were emphasized and nurtured by political parties such as the National Democrats (known in Polish as the *Endecja* in reference to the letters N and D), a powerful right-wing Polish nationalist party that saw advantages in stoking antagonism.

We identify two dimensions of polarization. The first is economic. The study of the economic roots of ethnic violence has a long pedigree in comparative politics (Bonacich, 1972; Forbes, 1997; Horowitz, 1985), and economic tensions certainly existed in interwar Poland. As Polonsky (1972, p. 59) notes, the National Democrats' party program called for "the securing of the Polish character of the towns, of industry and trade as one of the most pressing needs of national policy." Although aimed at all minorities, the Jews were a particular target. At just less than 10% of the population, according to figures from the late 1920s and early 1930s, Jews composed more than 70% of university graduates (Marcus, 1983, p. 67), composed more than 70% of those employed in commerce (Tomaszewski, 1989, p. 147), and controlled 39 of 137 joint-stock companies in commerce (Tomaszewski, 1989, p. 143). Particularly sensitive were the small market towns, the so-called *shtetlach*, where Jews tended to be notably wealthier and more influential than their peasant neighbors and Jewish-Gentile relations could be especially fraught.³ Żbikowski (2007, pp. 343-345) relates that both Jewish and Polish accounts of the pogroms indicate that robbery was an important motive. To pick up the effect of economic tensions we include a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a municipality is classified as a *shtetl*, coded from information

found on the nationmaster.com online encyclopedia.⁴ This is a crude measure inasmuch as there appear to be no hard and fast rules about what exactly counts as a shtetl, but it does give us some purchase on where Polish–Jewish economic tensions are likely to have been the highest.

The second dimension of polarization is cultural and political. The National Democrats wanted to create a Polish nation-state in which the Polish language and culture dominated throughout the territory but had to contend with a minority population composing roughly one third of the population. Their preferred solution was assimilation of the Slavic minorities and discrimination against Jews (and Germans).⁵ Brass (2006) attributes Hindu–Muslim riots in India to the presence of “institutionalized riot systems,” networks of activists whose purpose was to maintain tension between the two groups and, when necessary, initiate violence.⁶ There is a good deal of anecdotal evidence that such networks existed in northeastern Poland by the late 1930s and that their members sympathized with the National Democrats. For example, in 1936 alone there were 21 pogroms and 348 “outbreaks” in the Białystok region (Tolisch, 1937). In a statement to the Sejm in 1937, Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski discussed his response to daily reports of anti-Jewish riots in the Wysoki Mazowiecki district of Białystok in a way strongly indicative of nationalist agitation:

The Starosta [district head] told me that the man behind the disturbances was a lawyer named Jursz leader of the National Democrats, but he never takes part in the riots personally. I sent for him. He was not at home, so I left word to tell him that Składkowski was here and said that if riots occur, he will be sent to Bereza [concentration camp] and will be freed only if for one month after his incarceration no riots will occur. When, therefore, riots took place, we sent him to Bereza. After six weeks, we freed him, no riots having occurred. . . . During the time of his imprisonment they evidently endeavored not to provoke riots, and none occurred. (Segal, 1938, p. 89)

As one pogrom participant testified during his (postwar) trial, “We all belonged to the *endecja*.”⁷

Yet although *Endecja* anti-Semitism represents but one end of a broad spectrum of Polish opinion, most Polish parties opposed Jewish national autonomy within Poland (Mendelsohn, 1983, p. 39). At a fundamental level this pitted them against most Jewish (and other nationalities’) parties, which in varying degrees fought for Jewish national rights such as local self-government, Hebrew and Yiddish education, and, in the case of the Orthodox, adhering to a

traditional way of life. In northeastern Poland the most important of such political groupings was the Bloc of National Minorities, a cross-ethnic electoral alliance founded by a Zionist party leader. As described by Mendelsohn (1983, pp. 53-54), it was built on the idea that all the minorities shared a similar interest in gaining national autonomy. The best strategy to achieve this, given electoral districts and rules favoring the Polish majority, was to form a united front. Popular support for the Bloc of National Minorities undoubtedly increased Polish suspicions that the minorities, and the Jews in particular, were resisting a reasonable accommodation with Polish national aspirations. We measure the political "distance" between Poles and Jews with results of the prewar national parliamentary elections, and in particular with Polish support for the National Democrats and the Jews' support for the Bloc of National Minorities. The higher the Polish support for the National Democrats and the Jewish support for the Minorities Bloc in a locality, the greater the level of intercommunal polarization.

The literature suggests a number of alternative explanations for spatial variation in ethnic violence. Some, such as state breakdown (Kalyvas, 2006; Petersen, 2002) and local electoral incentives (Wilkinson, 2004) are clearly insufficient because of Polish circumstances in summer, 1941. Political authority in Poland collapsed soon after Germany invaded Soviet-occupied Poland in June 1941, and this was followed by a wave of pogroms in areas abandoned by the Soviets but not yet fully occupied by the Germans. Needless to say, there were no elections on the eastern front and hence no electoral incentives to initiate riots. Nor did state breakdown cause the pogroms, at least in any direct sense. First, the (Soviet) state broke down everywhere the Soviets withdrew from, not just in those localities that happened to experience pogroms. Since there is no variation in state breakdown across northeastern Poland, breakdown per se cannot logically account for spatial variation within that region. Second, as the Germans began to assume control of eastern Poland, they encouraged Poles to initiate pogroms. This is clear from a July 1, 1941, order given by Nazi security police chief Reinhard Heydrich to the *Einsatzgruppen*, mobile killing units charged with eliminating "undesirable groups" in the eastern territories. The order stipulated that, unless considered especially dangerous, Poles should not be included in "cleansing actions, especially as they are of great importance as elements for initiating pogroms and for obtaining information."⁸ Moreover, Stola (2004, p. 390) notes that the type of killing that took place in several locations, especially in July and August 1941, indicates a degree of planning and coordination, sometimes between German and local Polish authorities.

A similar argument can be made for the interethnic civic engagement networks that Varshney (2002) found account for the prevalence of Hindu–Muslim riots in India. The basic logic is straightforward: “Where such networks of engagement exist, tensions and conflicts were regulated and managed; where they are missing, communal identities led to endemic and ghastly violence” (Varshney, 2002, p. 10). Such networks may well be effective under settled political conditions (though see Wilkinson, 2004, pp. 53–57, for a contrary view), but Varshney himself acknowledges that they break down in times of (civil) war. Although the 1941 pogroms lie outside the scope of Varshney’s theory, we do find some evidence that pogroms were less likely where certain political parties worked for intercommunal peace during the interwar period. We address this mitigating factor further below.

Other alternatives are not so readily dismissed, such as perceived Jewish collaboration with the Soviet Union during the Soviet occupation of 1939–1941 (Petersen, 2002; Żbikowski, 2007). The basic argument is simple: Jews were seen as having abetted and benefited from the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland that had begun in the aftermath of the 1939 Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact. Even nonnationalist historians have pointed to the initially warm welcome that some Jews gave to the Soviets on their entry into the towns and villages of the region in 1939 and note the positions that Jews occupied under the new disposition that were unimaginable 2 months before.⁹ During the nearly 2-year Soviet occupation, formerly dominant Poles became subordinate to a new Soviet administration that sought to play social groups off against each other in its search for popular support and in which Jews were overrepresented (relative to their earlier inferior status).¹⁰ Consequently, Jews became identified with the Soviet abuse of power, including expropriation of property, deportation of locals, execution of political prisoners, destruction of civil society, and the dismantlement of the national state itself. The summer 1941 pogroms that broke out as the Nazis pushed the Red Army out of eastern Poland were thus considered “payback” for alleged Jewish collaboration with the Soviet occupation.

This argument has not been easy to test because it is difficult to disentangle collaboration from the broader issue of Polish anti-Semitism, which even before the Soviet occupation associated Jews with the communist threat. Were beliefs about Jewish collaboration rooted in the idea of “Judeo-Bolshevism” (Golczewski, 1981, pp. 233–333) that had gained currency by the early 20th century or, alternatively, in observed Jewish participation in the Soviet state apparatus? As Petersen (2002, p. 113) notes (in reference to Lithuania), rage at the misery wrought by the Soviet occupation renders the point moot.

Whatever the actual level of Jewish collaboration, which certainly did not encompass a very high proportion of the Jewish population, the proportion was wildly inflated by Poles predisposed to think that most of the communists were Jews and who were seeking scapegoats for their fate under Soviet rule. Petersen's account does suggest two predictions for where pogroms are likely to occur. One is where Jews were most visible. Visibility makes collaboration palpable and the Jews more vulnerable, endangering even those, such as the elderly and children, who could not have collaborated in any meaningful way. As a measure of visibility we use the proportion of Jews in a given settlement. A second is where communists were the most visible. The best indicator we have of communist popularity is the support municipalities gave to the communists in the interwar period. To measure this we use the proportion of the vote that went to communist parties in the 1928 national parliamentary elections.

Data and Method

We construct our pogrom database from historical narratives about wartime Poland, particularly Żbikowski (2002) and Dmitrów (2002). A common danger with such a procedure is that sources often suffer from selection bias: The narratives may focus on only the larger and well-known incidents, making it difficult to infer what happened in places not mentioned. We compensate for this by checking the results against more comprehensive reference works related to the period, such as Rubin (2006). The result yielded 37 pogroms across 231 localities.

Our data on the ethnic and political characteristics of localities are drawn from published results of the 1921 census and the 1922 and 1928 national parliamentary election results, which we then match.¹¹ We acknowledge the limitations of these data, but they nonetheless remain the best systematic information we have on the distribution of ethnic affiliation and political preference across Poland's localities. Regarding the census data, which are known to have overcounted the number of Poles, we follow Tomaszewski (1985) and employ religion rather than national affiliation. Thus, Poles are assumed to be Roman Catholic, Belarusians Orthodox, and Jews (*żydowska*) Jews (*mojżeszowego*). Of course this solution does not solve the problem of using 1921 data to approximate 1941 conditions, but that is a drawback we must live with.¹²

The electoral data suffer from similar limitations of temporal proximity to the event of interest. Unfortunately, no nationwide election after 1928 was free and fair enough to provide a reliable snapshot of political preferences.

Given what we know about the course of politics after 1928, it is safe to say that our measure is likely to underestimate the influence of polarization. The reason is the influence of the National Democrats steadily increased during the early 1930s, and made huge inroads after Piłsudski's death in 1935.¹³ One upshot of the temporal distance between our measure of polarization and the acts of violence is that it is clear that polarization is not itself endogenous to the violence, as in other cases.¹⁴

Another feature of the electoral data is that the results were published mainly for cities and rural communes (*gminas*). This poses a problem of matching the electoral with the pogrom data when the latter refer to townships that did not have their electoral data published. Fortunately in Białystok there were only a few such instances, and in these cases we matched the pogrom data with the corresponding gmina of which the municipality was a part.

We examine the relationship between intercommunal polarization and pogroms in two ways. First, we subdivide the sample according to whether a pogrom did or did not occur and present descriptive demographic and electoral statistics. The purpose of this is to establish some *prima facie* differences that do not rely on any statistical assumptions. Second, we run a series of logit analyses with the dichotomous pogrom variable as the outcome. We hypothesize that intercommunal polarization increases the likelihood of pogroms. A logit analysis will allow us to establish the effects of polarization independent of alternative hypotheses such as support for the Soviet occupation.

In each of the above steps we face the problem of ecological inference. For any given locality we know how many votes were given to a particular party and how many of each ethnic group dwelled there. What we do not know, except in cases of homogeneous settlements, is what proportion of a given ethnic group supported a particular party. This is important because our measure of political polarization relies not on how well nationalist and minorities' parties performed but on *Polish* support for the National Democrats (Endecja) and *Jewish* support for the Bloc of National Minorities. These quantities must be computed. We thus make two further simplifying assumptions. The first is that the fraction of voters for a particular group reflects their fraction of the total population as recorded in the census. This discounts differential turnout rates across groups but is not wholly unreasonable. Second, we assume that only Poles support the Endecja and only non-Poles (Jews in particular) support the Bloc of National Minorities. These assumptions are not perfect, but they are reasonable. As Kopstein and Wittenberg (in press) show, in the national parliamentary elections of 1928 only 1% of Jews supported the Right (which included the Endecja and other parties) and only 6% of Poles supported the Bloc of National Minorities.

Table 1. Sample Averages in Pogrom and Nonpogrom Localities

	Pogroms	No pogroms
Number of Jews	4,139	308
Fraction Polish (%)	53	74
Fraction Jewish (%)	42	7
Fraction Belarusian (%)	4	17
Endecja 1922 (%)	61	51
Endecja 1928 (%)	40	34
Communist 1928 (%)	3	10
Minorities Bloc 1928 (%)	54	22
N	28	158

Source: Census data and authors' computation of fraction of Poles supporting the Endecja in 1922 and 1928 and of minorities supporting the Minorities Bloc in 1928.

What Makes Pogrom Localities Different?

Do pogrom localities differ in systematic ways from other localities? Table 1 compares the ethnic and political characteristics of localities where pogroms occurred to characteristics of localities where they did not. There are three noteworthy features. First, the pogroms occurred where the most Jews were, in both absolute and percentage terms. At one level this is unremarkable: If the object was to persecute Jews, then it was logical to focus on where they were most visible, that is, where more of the Jews dwelled, in the cities.¹⁵ At another level, however, it may suggest something about the perpetrators. If virulent anti-Semitism was behind the violence there is no reason why pogroms should not have broken out in localities where there were smaller numbers of Jews. These populations would have been particularly vulnerable to the Poles among whom they lived.¹⁶ Yet no pogrom occurred in any settlement with fewer than 360 Jews (Wąsosz). This result is also consistent with the hypothesis advanced by Petersen, that pogroms will be more likely to have occurred where Jews were more visible because in these locations the identification of Jews with the Soviet occupation was more palpable.¹⁷

Second, in partial contradiction to our claim about the detrimental effects of polarization, the two subsamples are not strongly differentiated in Polish support of the Endecja. In 1922, a high point of rightist strength in the 1920s, a majority of Poles supported them in both pogrom areas (61%) and nonpogrom areas (51%). Even as Endecja popularity dropped among Poles in the run-up to the 1928 election, there remained no appreciable difference between

pogrom and nonpogrom localities. The same cannot be said for the other side of polarization, namely Jewish support for the Minorities Bloc, with 54% support in pogrom localities and 22% elsewhere. A vote for the Bloc represented a vote for a kind of ethnic particularism in which “Polish” parties were rejected in favor of ethnic ones. Minorities in localities where support for the Bloc was high would have resisted integration into Polish society more strongly than elsewhere and thus have engendered more hostility or at least indifference from their Polish neighbors.

Third, and ironically, the relationship between communist support and the later occurrence of a pogrom is the opposite of what one would expect given the importance attributed to alleged Jewish collaboration with the Soviet occupation. Although communist support was low everywhere, it was 3 times as low in places that would later experience a pogrom. Our hunch is that this result reflects two significant but unappreciated facts about the sociology of communist support in interwar Poland. The first is that at the mass level the communists did not attract many votes from Jews (Kopstein & Wittenberg, 2003). The second is that areas where communist sympathy was strong among non-Jews were not fertile ground for those wishing to instigate anti-Jewish violence. The communists did not recoil from violence, but it was directed more at class enemies than at ethnic ones.

These basic descriptive findings on the importance of Jewish ethnic particularism (but not of polarization more broadly) are confirmed in Table 2, which presents the results of a logit analysis in which the occurrence of a pogrom (or not) across localities is the outcome to be explained and the explanatory variables are the population fractions of Jews and Poles and the difference between the two (fraction of Jews minus fraction of Poles), the proportion of Jews estimated to have supported the Bloc of National Minorities in 1928, the proportion of Poles estimated to have supported the *Endecja* in 1928,¹⁸ polarization (defined as the sum of the two aforementioned quantities), the communist vote in 1928, and a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a municipality was a *shtetl* (a small market town). To illustrate the effect of using different indicators for the key concepts, we present the results in four different models.

Table 2 illustrates the importance of disaggregating our conceptualization of polarization, which contains both a political dimension (the sum of Jewish support for the Minorities Bloc and Polish support for the *Endecja*) and an economic one (whether a municipality was a *shtetl*). First, although political polarization has little effect on the outcome (Model 1), this is because the occurrence of a pogrom has far more to do with Jewish political behavior than with Polish (Models 2–4). Consistent with Table 1 but contrary to substantial

Table 2. Logit Analysis of Pogrom Occurrence in Białystok Voivodship

Explanatory variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE
Jewish–Polish pop diff	3.62***	(0.93)	3.70***	(0.95)				
Frac Jews					13.84**	(7.05)	9.90***	(3.28)
Frac Poles					5.79	(6.42)	2.68	(2.78)
Polarization	0.76	(0.97)						
Jewish MinBloc vote			2.30**	(1.31)	1.71	(1.41)	2.51**	(1.27)
Polish Endecja vote			−1.02	(1.45)	−1.06	(1.50)	−0.96	(1.31)
Communist vote	−13.25**	(6.30)	−10.48*	(6.37)	−7.47	(8.30)		
Shtetl	1.04	(0.73)	0.94	(0.74)	0.68	(0.79)	0.92	(0.66)
Constant	−0.33	(1.21)	−0.33	(0.74)	−9.15	(6.27)	−6.73**	(2.60)
N	153		153		153		207	

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

anecdotal evidence, the strength of Polish nationalism (Polish Endecja Vote) has no effect on the probability of a pogrom. What mattered more was Jewish support for a party advocating ethnic particularism. Such support is best seen in Model 4, which encompassed far more observations because of the exclusion of communist vote, which was missing for many areas of northeastern Poland. Second, although Jewish wealth was plundered in the course of the pogroms, such plunder was not more likely to occur in localities where economic tensions between Jews and Gentiles were likely to have been the highest, in the small market towns (the *shtetl* variable in Models 1–4). In the end, polarization does matter, but not exactly in the way we initially thought.

There is also support in Table 2 for the collaboration thesis, but again not as originally hypothesized. The probability of a pogrom does increase as the fraction of Jews increases (Models 3–4), but the communist vote has the opposite effect. Contrary to claims that pogroms are about revenge being taken for siding with the Soviet occupation, communist support seems to provide strong and robust immunization against pogroms (Models 1–2). This is doubly ironic because places with strong communist support during the interwar period are likely to have been the most welcoming of the Soviet

occupation and therefore ought to have been the first targets of pogroms. Our finding also constitutes indirect evidence that, contrary to the views of Wierzbicki (2007) and “Polish nationalist” historians, who see the pogroms as anti-Soviet rather than anti-Jewish actions, exactly the reverse is true.

To gauge the magnitude of the effects (which are not directly interpretable from the coefficients), we compute the predicted probabilities of a pogrom occurrence for Model 4 based on different values for the number of Jews and minority support for the Bloc of National Minorities, setting the other explanatory variables at their “average” values in the sample. First, if all variables are set at their means, the expected probability of a pogrom occurring is 5% (2, 10).¹⁹ Thus, there is a low probability of a pogrom occurring in the “average” locality. This is not surprising given that most localities do not experience a pogrom. Having a large number of Jews dramatically raises the probability of a pogrom: When the fraction of Jews is set to the 90th percentile in the data (49%) and other factors are set at their means, the probability of a pogrom increases to 58% (17, 90). Jewish towns were clearly targets. If a large proportion of Jews opts for the Minorities Bloc (70%, the 90th percentile) but other factors are held at their means, the probability of a pogrom rises to 12% (4, 27). Jews living as a local minority were especially vulnerable if they were seen to opt for ethnic particularism. If, however, both the number of Jews and minority support are at their 90th percentile, the probability of a pogrom skyrockets to 77% (44, 96). Settlements with large numbers of Jews who supported the strongest advocate for Jewish national rights more than likely fell victim to pogroms.

Discussion

Why should localities with high numbers of Jews and high Minorities Bloc support have been so vulnerable to a pogrom? The results suggest that whatever the identity of the perpetrators, localities where the Jews were already perceived as a threatening “Other”—places with large numbers of Jews who opted for ethnic particularism—provided fertile ground for anti-Jewish violence. As Stola (2001) notes, the pogroms involved a great deal of participation, both “active” and “passive.”²⁰ Where the population was more polarized, Poles from across the political and economic spectrum were more likely to give in to the temptation to commit violence, more tolerant of others committing violence, and less likely to come to the aid of the victims. In short, the community expectation in pogrom localities either encouraged or at least failed to discourage Polish violence against Jews. The prevalent attitude in pogrom localities was as much indifference as hatred or rage.

An account of one less-known pogrom—Szczuczyn, on June 25, 1941, in which approximately 300 Jews were killed by local Poles—may help illustrate the underlying causal mechanisms and complex mix of emotions at work. According to Chaye Soika-Golding, one of the local Jewish survivors from the war, the Germans quickly swept into town on June 22:

They hung up their swastika flag and pushed on further. The city lay in chaos. Authority passed to the hands of the Poles. This lasted about two weeks. All kinds of rowdies were let out of prison: Dombrovski Yakubtshuk, the well known Polish arrestees under the Bolsheviks—Shviatlovski, chief of the guard and Yankayitis, the director of the school, and others. They were full of rancor for the Bolsheviks and the Jews. Friday night [June 25] when the entire city slept quietly, the slaughter began. They [the Poles] had organized it very well: one gang in the new section, a second in the marketplace, a third on Lomzher Street. . . . There in the new section they murdered Romorovske's family (the tailor), Esther Krieger (your neighbor with the youngest daughter), Soreh Beylkeh, Eynikl, Pishke, Yashinski, Mayzler (the head of the yeshivah)—all in their own houses . . . and many more. They had killed Rozental's children in the marketplace. They had also killed Kheyshe with her six month old child at breast and her older boy Grishen. . . . Later the squads divided up the possessions of their victims amongst themselves. On readied wagons they loaded the corpses and led them just outside of the town. The *goy's* immediately washed the bloodied floors including the stones on the street. A few hundred sacrifices had taken place in one night and still, the murderers informed us, the massacres would continue for two more nights. ("Destruction," 1954/1987, pp. 10-11, 21)

The elements are all there. The Soviet occupation, the collapse of authority, the riot agitators, the hatred and fear, the rage of the nationalist crowd, the thirst for revenge, blood, and booty, and, ultimately, the intimate violence are all contained within this short narrative. What came next, however, provides crucial clues to the permissive communal context in which the pogrom could occur and deepen.

Those remaining were stricken with fear. What do we do? How can we save ourselves? My mother ran to the priests to beg for the Jews. They offered no help. With Chana, Libe, Zeml, and Salen, I ran to the Polish intelligentsia. There too we found no salvation. My mother with two

other women ran after help in Grayeve [a nearby town]; they were not let into the town—curfew. What do we do? Night was falling upon us. Approximately 20 Germans entered the city—a field troupe. We were afraid to show ourselves before them. Then I had an idea: to try our luck with the soldiers, maybe they would help us. With great difficulty we chose a delegation and departed. The group of Germans consisted of soldiers and two officers. In the beginning they declined to help us, “This is not our business, we are fighting on the front, not with civilians,” they explained. However, when I offered them soap and coffee, they softened up. They guarded the city at night and all remained quiet. I, with two other women, began to work for them, and later we were placed to work in the German headquarters. And so, in this manner, the pogroms in Szczuczyn were stopped for awhile.

This passage strongly indicates that what allowed the pogrom to get off the ground and intensify was not merely hatred, hostility, and rage but also the quite obvious *indifference* of key members of the local Polish community toward the fate of the town’s Jews. Szczuczyn’s Jewish women expected something different. Their first instinct once they understood their predicament was to turn to the priest and the intelligentsia, whom they believed could have stopped the bloodshed. But neither the priest nor the intelligentsia—a broad category in Eastern Europe that refers to the prominent and educated, especially doctors, lawyers, and school teachers—were moved by the frantic appeals of the petrified Jewish women to intervene, a point stressed in several testimonies written at different times and places (“Destruction,” 1954/1987). Neither lifted a finger or showed any sign of solidarity with their fellow citizens. The women did not encounter hatred in their demarches; they reported no reaction, “no help,” “no salvation,” nothing. They met indifference. Whether they also offered “soap” and “coffee” to these men remains unknown. It is also difficult to determine whether the town’s Polish spiritual and educated elite set the tone for the pogrom or merely reacted to the context in which they lived. Our statistical analysis, however, points to the context: In Szczuczyn, a town where 56% of the 4,502 inhabitants were Jewish, 88% of whom voted for Jewish parties in 1922 and 85% in 1928, and where the communists attracted a mere 2% of the vote, Jew and Poles were already polarized and the stage was set for a pogrom.²¹

Why were some communities so polarized and others not? One inhibiting factor may be Marshal Józef Piłsudski’s Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (known by the Polish acronym *BBWR*), a party that advocated toleration and accommodation of the minorities. Piłsudski saw

the danger posed by the National Democrats and ultimately seized power in a coup. His plan was for a reconstructed, technocratic, and ethnically tolerant, albeit authoritarian, party to guide the country to a “statist” as opposed to an “ethnic” order.²² The vehicle for this plan was the BBWR, which was not a typical political party with grass-roots organizations. The leadership at the local level consisted primarily of state officials and local dignitaries.²³ It was, however, the one Polish party that tried to bridge both class and ethnic divides and thereby remove the National Democratic poison from Polish politics.²⁴ Its electoral success was an indicator of less ethnically polarized politics.

The BBWR received on average 19% of the vote where pogroms occurred versus 29% where they did not, a difference of 10 percentage points.²⁵ Here it is important to know the ethnic composition of the vote. Is the increased percentage in nonpogrom localities an indicator of greater Polish support and thus more moderate politics? Or is it a result of greater Jewish support and thus an indicator of greater efforts at integration? Our data do not permit us to estimate the ethnic composition of the BBWR at the settlement level, but we can use ecological inference techniques to estimate these quantities for the pogrom and nonpogrom subsamples as a whole. The best of these methods combines deterministic information about the possible values of the quantity of interest (in this case the fraction of Jews or Poles in a locality that could hypothetically have supported the BBWR) with a statistical model of what the most likely values of those quantities are within that range of possibilities. For example, if there was a municipality that had 90% Jews and the BBWR received 5% of the vote, then we know that at most 5.5% (5 of 90) of the Jews could have supported the BBWR, and possibly none at all. The range of possible Jewish support for the BBWR is (0, 5.5). The goal of ecological inference is to estimate where in that range the actual level of support is most likely to be.²⁶

The results appear in Table 3, which illustrates the estimated percentages of Poles and Jews who supported the BBWR in both pogrom and nonpogrom localities. These findings buttress our earlier evidence that the defining electoral characteristic of pogrom localities is the behavior of Jews rather than of the Poles. There is no significant difference in Polish support for the BBWR between pogrom sites (30%) and nonpogrom sites (28%). The same cannot be said for Jewish support, which rises from 9% where pogroms occurred to 21% where they did not. Jews who supported the BBWR were making a choice in favor of greater integration into Polish society.²⁷

Most historians maintain that Jewish support for the BBWR came from a mixture of semiskilled artisans, small merchants, and the Orthodox community (Bacon, 1996). It is difficult, therefore, to maintain that this integration was a form of cultural, much less religious, assimilation. What it was,

Table 3. Ecological Estimates of Polish and Jewish Support for the BBWR in Białystok Voivodship, 1928

	Support for BBWR				N
	Poles		Jews		
Pogroms	30	(21, 41)	9	(2, 20)	30
No pogroms	28	(24, 33)	21	(11, 33)	118

The estimates in the first two columns of the table contain the fraction of Polish and Jewish support for the BBWR in Białystok localities where Poles and Jews each constituted at least 1% of the population. Associated 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses. The number of observations in each subsample is in the third column.

however, was a form of *political* assimilation that may have constituted one possible path to reducing the hostility and indifference between Poles and their Jewish neighbors at the local level. This kind of assimilation was not the thick solidarity of a nation, but it may nevertheless have provided just enough communal cohesion, the bare minimum, to prevent the worst sort of depredations when all other factors pointed in that direction.

Of course, it is hard to say whether the BBWR succeeded in reducing polarization or simply received a greater share of the vote in municipalities already less polarized. Since it was led by state officials at the local level, it stands to reason, however, that its success was a function of the ability of these officials to partially reconcile Poles and non-Poles. In the years after 1928 these officials, the “Piłsudskiites,” may have had the skill and resources to continue this project well into 1930s. That, at any rate, was the plan, at least until Piłsudski’s death in 1935.²⁸ Yet whether the BBWR’s popularity was a cause or a consequence of decreased polarization, the political integration of a sizable portion of all groups under the BBWR umbrella was a defining characteristic of nonpogrom localities.

Conclusion

This article makes two contributions. First, to return to our main hypothesis, we find that nationalist ideology and organization is less predictive of pogroms than the failure of the Polish state to politically integrate its Jewish citizens and the decision of many Jews to opt for ethnic particularism. Intercommunal polarization is more about the behavior of Jews than that of Poles. This finding should not be interpreted as blaming the victims. Jewish support for the Minorities Bloc did not mean implacable resistance to integrating into

Poland's social and political life. Representatives of the parties of minorities in the Sejm would have jumped at the opportunity to be part of a governing coalition, but they were never given the chance. Although Jews appeared on the electoral lists of other "Polish" parties, in the end not one Jewish (or Ukrainian, German, or Belarusian) cabinet minister from among the minority parties was chosen in the entire interwar era. Responsibility for that properly lies with the "Polish" parties who were forming governments, not with the Jews who were seeking the best way to address their communal concerns. At the same time, it is clear that Poles were reacting to the perceived unwillingness of Jews to assimilate into Polish political life.

Second, our study points to the potential theoretical importance of political assimilation in fostering the absolute minimum of solidarity for preventing intercommunal violence. Although the term *assimilation* has a checkered history in social science, our data suggest that it may be worth invoking in a revised form (Brubaker, 2001). Assimilation in politics need not be thought of as changing as something as fundamental as "identity" but, rather, as a new willingness to engage in an act as simple and mundane as joining with fellow citizens in supporting the same political party. In this limited sense our findings are consistent with those of Varshney (2002), who extols the advantages of interethnic civic engagement.

Why should political assimilation prevent pogroms? Where minorities are better integrated, they are presumably less despised, looked on with less indifference, and more likely to be thought of as part of the community.²⁹ All communities undoubtedly have members that respect members of other groups; equally, all communities have what Brass (2006) calls "riot specialists." Surviving and preventing pogroms may depend more on the presence of "friends" from other groups than on "enemies," and it is harder to find those "friends" where polarization is high. Jews had enough enemies in wartime Poland. They got by, if only temporarily, with a little help, if not from their friends, then from those with whom they shared a minimum of solidarity.

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Notes

1. The book set off a sustained and heated debate within Poland and among scholars internationally. The debate surrounding this work is concisely summarized in Shore (2005).
2. Kalyvas (2006, p. 63) drawing on Esteban and Ray (1994, pp. 819-852).
3. For a detailed discussion of life in the interwar shtetl, see Kassow (1989, pp. 198-220 **[AQ: 4]**).
4. See <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Shtetl> (accessed May 3, 2009).
5. See Polonsky (1972, pp. 52-61). Also see Porter (2000, pp. 227-232).
6. The role of local networks is also highlighted in Scacco (2008).
7. Żbikowski (2002, p. 97 **[AQ: 5]**).
8. Ereignismeldungen UdSSR, no. 10, July 2, 1941, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R. 58/214, 52-53, cited in Musiał (2004, p. 336).
9. "An outburst of joy and relief was the overwhelming reaction of the Jews in many of the shtetlach of Eastern Poland to the entry of the Soviet army. It is true that there were those who followed with apprehension and misgivings the advancing columns of the Red Army, and for good reasons. Yet at the moment of first encounter the dominant sentiment in 'the Jewish street' was that they were rescued" (Pinchuk, 1990, p. 21).
10. For a comprehensive review of ethnic relations under Soviet occupation in this region, see Wierzbicki (2000). On Łomża in particular, see Gnatowski (1997, 2004). For first-person narrative accounts, see Bardach (1998) and Grudzinska-Gross (1981).
11. See Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (1924) and L'Office Central de Statistique de la République Polonaise (1926, 1930).
12. In the one region of Poland for which we have 1939 population data at the settlement level, Eastern Galicia, the correlation between the fraction of Jews in 1921 and 1939 is .97.

13. Mendelsohn (1983, pp. 73-74). Among the many Jewish issues occupying Polish political discourse in this period were the campaign against, and extensive Sejm debate over, (Jewish) ritual slaughter, the establishment of ghetto benches at universities, and, most seriously, the economic boycott of Jewish businesses that was connected to pogroms in the 1930s.
14. See Kalyvas (2006, pp. 77-82) for discussion and examples of endogenous polarization.
15. This finding is also consistent with the pattern of the 1919 pogroms. See Abramson (1999, pp. 119-130).
16. Indeed the risks to the perpetrators would have been lower where there were fewer Jews. On the calculation of these risks and the propensity to target individuals in locations with low risk to the perpetrators, see Horowitz (2001, p. 527).
17. It may also be true that Jewish collaboration with the Soviet authorities was more probable and visible in locations with large numbers of Jews. In places where there were few Jews, so the argument might run, the Soviets were more likely to rely on local Poles. Although the data are consistent with the logic, we have no direct evidence to prove this. Jasiewicz's (2001) quantitative work on the ethnic composition of administration during this period in the Białystok region explicitly denies any disproportionate role for Jews in ruling circles.
18. The Endecja failed to field candidates in many areas in 1928. To avoid losing roughly half of our observations, we replace the missing data with the 1922 outcome. The results do not qualitatively change if we run the model with just 1922 Endecja data.
19. In the remainder of the article, the 95% confidence interval is listed after the estimated value. Expected values and associated confidence intervals were computed using Clarify. See King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000) and Tomz, Wittenberg, and King (2003).
20. Sometimes the perpetrators even originated from outside the settlement, as, for example, in Radziłów, where some of the same people had carried out atrocities in Wąsosz the day before. See Machcewicz and Persak (2002, Vol. 2, Document 19).
21. The fact that a group of German soldiers *stopped* the pogrom is also evidence that whatever the Nazis' overall plans for the area and its Jews, at the local level there were some circumstances in which the Germans preferred to keep order or at least to maintain a monopoly of violence.
22. See Rothschild (1966).
23. See Chojnowski (1986).
24. See Snyder (2005, p. 63).
25. In Szczuczyn, the case discussed above, the BBWR received only 8% of the vote, a result consistent with what happened on June 25, 1941.

26. We use the ecological inference model presented in Rosen, Jiang, King, and Tanner (2001), and the R implementation in Wittenberg, Alimadhi, Bhaskar, and Lau (2007).
27. It is important as well to note that in locations where no pogroms occurred 28% of Poles voted for the BBWR notwithstanding a steady stream of Endecja propaganda and campaign posters proclaiming the BBWR to be essentially a “Jewish” party. See Plach (2006, pp. 138-157)
28. On this project, see Snyder (2005). Even though the BBWR was a party of elites, it spawned a large number of pro-Piłsudskite, nonelite associations and publications in the years after 1928 to promote civic activism and “moral regeneration” (*sanacja* in Polish, the unofficial ideology of the Piłsudskiite order). See Plach (2006).
29. On the much higher survival rate of the assimilated Athens Jews compared to the unassimilated Jews of Thessaloniki, see Mavrogordatos (2008).

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