

Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Northeastern Poland, Summer 1941

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In this chapter we turn to an analysis of the pogroms of summer 1941 in the northeastern kresy, a region of Poland occupied by and then annexed to the Soviet Union as part of the Western provinces of the Belarusian republic following the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939. We focus on the territories that had been the Polish voivodships of Białystok and Polesie before the Soviet annexation. The main ethnic groups inhabiting these areas were Poles, Jews, and Belarusians. Our analysis of 352 localities in these voivodships shows that pogroms occurred where Poles considered Jewish calls for communal autonomy and cultural rights a political threat to their ethnic dominance. This account stands in contrast to others that have stressed the decisive importance of the German invasion, Jewish support for communism, and Polish anti-Semitism. This is not to say that the German invasion and Soviet occupation did not matter or that Polish anti-Semitism was not present, but that where these factors produced pogroms depended decisively on the local political landscape in a way previously unacknowledged in scholarship.

We begin the chapter with an overview of wartime conditions and the extent of Polish national feeling in Białystok and Polesie on the eve of the pogroms. We then offer some prima facie evidence for the applicability of the power-threat hypothesis by comparing municipalities where pogroms did not occur with those where they did occur. Following that we introduce a statistical model that shows that the perceived Jewish threat to Polish dominance predicts pogroms even once factors such as Polish nationalism and the extent of communist support are taken into account. The penultimate section interprets these findings in the context of how pogroms actually played out. We conclude with speculation on what our results imply about the potentially beneficial effects of political assimilation.

Białystok and Polesie at the Outset of War

[Fill in with information on movement of German army and *Einsatzgruppen*.]

Anti-Semitic Polish Nationalism

Historians and survivors both point to the strength of the anti-Semitic and Polish nationalist National Democrats (*Endecja*) as the key to understanding pogroms (Zbikowski, 2007). Israel Lewin, a survivor from Wizna, was advised to flee by a Polish friend soon after the outbreak of the war because "the nationalists have already been given permission to do what they want." (AŻIH 301-4391); Szymon Datner's another account of the same town testified that "Polish fascists, anti-Semites of long standing, the well known Endeks sized up the situation and began persecuting those Jews who were in hiding."(AŻIH 301-192). Datner's account of the Kolno pogrom points to the same group: "It was not in vain that the Polish Endeks and fascists had drummed into their minds over the course of long years the notion that Jews and Communists were one and the same thing, and they were the ones responsible for their misfortune"(AŻIH 3011996).

The *Endecja* was in fact particularly strong in parts of Białystok and Polesie. In 1902, of the 6800 members of one of the main precursor civic organizations to the National Democrats in all of Poland, almost one third (2,275) were active in the Łomża region, which comprises part of Białystok (Wolsza, 1992). Most historians trace the organizational capacity of the *Endecja* in these regions to the size and social position of the petty nobility, the so-called *szlachta zagorodowa*, who possessed small farms and often lived no better than the peasantry among whom they resided. This group had a reputation for fanatical patriotism, religiosity, and a sense of belonging to a socially better stratum than the ordinary folk (burghers, peasants, and Jews) in their surroundings.

In independent Poland, the National Democrats emerged as the strongest party in the region, winning on average over half of votes cast in the 229 settlements of the Białystok voivodship in 1922. The party could draw upon both an anti-Jewish political Catholicism and a deep resentment against Jewish economic competition in the small market towns, the *shtetlach*. We lack systematic data for all of the towns in our two provinces, but one study of

the retail sector in 11 towns in the Białystok region found that in 1932, 663 of 721 retail shops (91%) were owned by Jews. Although this proportion dropped in the face of the growth of the Polish retail sector and economic pressure applied against Jews after Piłsudski's death, by 1937 Jews still owned 563 of 873 retail shops (64%) in these same towns, providing plenty of fuel of National Democratic agitation and boycotts (Linder 1937, 17 cited in Mendelsohn 1983, 75).

In the late 1930s, these boycotts were frequently accompanied by pogroms in this region and were abetted by the growth of what social scientists today would call pogrom "networks" (Brass 2006; Scacco 2008). The existence of such networks and their connection with the National Democrats in northeastern Poland during the late 1930s is supported by a great deal of anecdotal and archival evidence. 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 Flawoj-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 prefect] 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 [prison] 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, 89).

In what follows, we show that pogrom localities differed in important ways from those towns and villages where pogroms did not occur. Pogroms occurred in localities with large number of Jews, where Jews comprised a large proportion of the population, where communism was weaker, where the inhabitants of surrounding localities were less educated and poorer, and, perhaps most powerfully, where the local Jewish population supported parties that advocated cultural and political autonomy. We then interpret these findings by turning

to several narratives of pogrom violence. The combination of factors leading to a pogrom suggests something about the complex mix of motives at work. Rather than hatred or revenge, inter-communal indifference provides the context in which pogroms occurred. It also points us to the theoretical importance of political assimilation in providing the bare minimum of inter-communal solidarity needed prevent the worst from occurring.

Pogrom and Non-Pogrom Localities

Do non-pogrom localities in northeastern Poland differ in systematic ways from other localities? As a first cut at this question we divide all 352 localities in our sample into two groups, those where pogroms occurred in summer 1941 and those where they did not. Table 1 reports median values for a range of the most important demographic and political characteristics across the Białystok and Polesia voivodships. The utility of this exercise is it requires no statistical assumptions.

Even a cursory examination of the table shows that there is some *prima facie* evidence that pogroms localities differed in systematic and important ways from places that did not experience a pogrom. First, focusing on the demographic data in the top third of the table, it is clear that pogroms occurred where more of the Jews actually resided, both in absolute terms and relative to the number of other nationalities. The differences are in fact stark: pogrom localities had more than ten times as many Jewish inhabitants as non-pogrom localities. 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. 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.¹ Yet no pogrom occurred

¹Indeed the risks to the perpetrators would have been lower where there were fewer Jews (who would presumably have less capacity to resist). On the calculation of these risks and the propensity to target individuals

	Pogrom	No Pogrom
Polish 21	33%	43%
Jewish 21	41	3
Orthodox 21	10	35
Number of Jews 21	1574	137
Pop 21	5290	5000
Bund 28	0%	0%
Orth Jew List 28	4	0
Min Bloc 28	22	1
Endecja 28	13	9
Comms 28	2	12
J Support 4 Bund 28	0	0
J Support 4 Orth 28	11	0
J Support 4 Min Bloc 28	51	39
P Support 4 Endecja 28	39	24
N	56	296

Table 1: Median Values of Basic Demographic and Political Characteristics of Pogrom and Non-Pogrom Localities. Source: census data and authors' computation.

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 or at least believable.²

Pogroms were also more likely to occur where Poles and Jews resided as the two dominant groups. The presence of a larger group of Belarusians reduced the likelihood of a pogrom. What would account for this? On the one hand, the changing demographic balance with the presence of a large ethnic group besides the Poles, may have altered the ethno-political

in locations with low risk to the perpetrators, see Horowitz (2001, 527).

²It 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 and Belarusians. Although the data are consistent with the logic, we have no direct evidence to prove this. Jasiewicz's (2001) and Brakel's (2007) work on the ethnic composition of the administrative elite during the 1939-1941 period explicitly denies any disproportionate role for the Jews in ruling circles.

dynamics in these villages in a way that benefitted the Jews. A second, possibility, however, one that we turn to shortly, concerns the political inclinations of the Belarusians themselves—their support for an authoritarian universalist alternative to liberalism: communism.

If we turn to the middle third of the table, there are significant distinctions in the political profiles of pogrom and non-pogrom localities, at least as measured by the outcome of the 1928 parliamentary election. Among Jewish parties neither the (socialist) Bund nor the Orthodox Jewish lists gained any traction, and in fact in most localities failed to attract any votes at all. In this part of Poland, Jews cast their votes for Bloc of National Minorities, which in 1928 continued to be dominated by the General Zionists. But the Bloc was not equally successful everywhere. It attracted only one percent of the vote where pogroms did not occur, and twenty-two percent where they did. This result is especially relevant for our argument that pogroms occurred because of a specifically political threat to the ethnic hierarchy experienced by Poles at the local level where Jews supported parties advocating cultural and political autonomy. Even support for the otherwise politically loyal orthodox Jewish list (dominated by the Aguda) did not protect the Jewish community, indicating that from the standpoint of local Poles, the distinction between Zionist and traditionalist orientations were not germane.

What about anti-Semitism? The stronger support for the *Endecja* in pogrom locations conforms to the conventional wisdom but it is worth noting that this difference is not nearly as large as the differences in the vote for Jewish parties. The lower support for communism in pogrom areas, on the other hand, does constitute a small piece of evidence against the hypothesis that pogroms were revenge for Jewish support for communism. Although communist support was low everywhere, it was 6 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—the strongest supporters, as the table suggests, were to be found among Belarusians in the eastern voivodships (Kopstein and 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 ethnic ones. We have no disaggregated data on Jewish participation in the Soviet occupation, but we can say that whatever the role the local communists played in abetting Soviet rule, there was little hint of mass communist support in the late 1920s.

More important than the percentage of support for ethnic parties, which reflect differences in the relative size of municipalities, may be the percentage of particular ethnic groups that support such parties. The idea here is to capture the possibility that what matters is less the relative demographic proportions of Poles and Jews than the kinds of Poles and Jews that coexisted in particular settlements. We would like to know whether pogroms are more likely where there are nationalist Jews and nationalist Poles. In the bottom section of table 1 we report the maximum percentage of a particular group that could have supported a given party or bloc assuming that support for that party or bloc came only from one particular national group in question. That is, we proceed with the assumption that only Jews supported the Bund, the Orthodox party, and the Bloc of National Minorities (a quite reasonable assumption), and that only Poles supported the *Endecja* (a less obvious but still reasonable assumption). Here we find solid support for the hypothesis that pogroms were most likely to occur where Jews supported minorities parties and Poles preferred the anti-Semitic *Endecja*.

Deadly Communities: Why Did Pogroms Occur in Some Localities But Not Others?

Table 1 provides prima facie evidence that there is something worth investigating. Pogroms tend to occur where there are more Jews, where there is more support for non-Polish ethnic parties, where there is lower support for communism, and where Polish nationalism is stronger. We would like to know the relative significance of these factors, and for that we need to specify a model. Our central claim is that something like Blalock's power-threat hy-

pothesis explains the distribution of pogroms: where Jewish demographics and political loyalties posed a threat to Polish power, Poles responded with pogroms. A common approach to modeling such a hypothesis with cross-sectional data (see, for example, Tolnay and Beck 1995 on lynchings) has been to run a simple logit with demographic and political variables indicating threat to majority power included on the right-hand side of the equation.

These results are displayed in Table 2. We present four logit models, but the main differences are between models 1 and 1I on the one hand and models 2 and 2I on the other. Model 1I differs from model 1 (and model 2I from 2) only in the inclusion of the fraction of the population that is illiterate in the “I” versions as an indicator of socio-economic development. As noted in the introductory chapter, a common argument is that pogroms were more about plunder than about racism, and illiterate Polish peasants are likely to have coveted Jewish property. Petseye Shuster-Rozenblum’s 1946 testimony on what transpired in Jasionówka is representative: After the departure of the Red Army, “[t]he darkest elements of the Polish people soon sense Jewish weakness, and don’t even wait for the Germans to arrive, but soon men come from the farms, boldly enter Jewish homes, in broad daylight taking what they can, and what they can’t they destroy where it is. They soon felt as if they had broad shoulders: the Germans would certainly allow their actions, and even condone them. Of course, this is only done by those Poles with base instincts; the shtetl workers resist and drive the robbers from the village....Here village peasants harness up the wagons, there they bring the stolen bundles to close neighbors in the shtetl in order to be able to run and grab something else, it’s such a good opportunity, they’ll be set for life, the shtetl never had such a holiday, the Christians call it *valny targ* (supermarket) and take pains not to let the opportunity slip away.” (AZIH 301-1274.) Unfortunately the illiteracy data is available only at the powiat level, one administrative level about the municipality. We therefore employ clustered standard errors in models 1I and 2I.

All four models employ the fraction of the population that is Jewish (FJew) and the absolute number of Jews (NJew) as indicators of the Jewish demographic threat, and the fractions

Explanatory Variable	Model 1	Model 1I	Model 2	Model 2I
NJew	.002** (.0007)	.001* (.0008)	.002** (.0007)	.002* (.0008)
FJew	-10.6 (6.8)	-6.3 (5.5)	-10.3 (6.5)	-10.2* (5.3)
FMinBloc	22.8** (10.2)	23.3*** (6.0)	- -	- -
FJew*Fminbloc	-1.0 (20.7)	-17.3 (17.5)	- -	- -
FJMinBloc	- -	- -	1.1 (1.4)	.9 (1.2)
FJew*FJMinBloc	- -	- -	20.9** (10.2)	18.3*** (4.5)
FComm	-2.5 (2.4)	-3.6** (1.7)	-2.9 (2.0)	-4.8*** (1.7)
FBBWR	3.3 (2.3)	2.9** (1.4)	2.7 (1.9)	.9 (2.6)
FEndek	1.8 (3.4)	4.2* (2.2)	- -	- -
FPEndek	- -	- -	2.0 (1.6)	2.8 (1.8)
Illiteracy	- -	5.8*** (1.8)	- -	5.7*** (2.1)
Constant	-4.1 (1.6)	-6.5** (.85)	-4.5 (1.3)	-5.7*** (1.7)
<i>N</i>	129	116	126	113

Table 2: Logit analysis of pogrom occurrence in Białystok and Polesie voivodships. Models 1I and 2I employ clustered standard errors because Illiteracy is measured at the powiat level. The table lists coefficients and corresponding standard errors underneath in parentheses. *** means $p < .01$, ** means $p < 0.05$, * means $p < 0.1$.

of the vote received by the communists (FComm) and Marshal Piłsudski's BBWR (FBBWR) as indicators of the political threat to Polish nationalists. Both the communists and BBWR, as we discuss, advocated Polish accommodation with its ethnic minorities. Basic power-threat theory would predict that the probability of a pogrom should increase with the magnitude of Jewish demographic influence and the extent of political threat from accommodationist parties, the latter acting to provoke a backlash against Jews by Polish nationalists.

Models 1 and 1I differ from 2 and 2I in their indicators of the political potential of Jewish and Polish nationalism. In models 1 and 1I these are proxied with the fractions of the vote received by the Bloc of National Minorities (FMinBloc) and the right-wing *Endecja* (FEndek), respectively. If the Jewish threat is viewed in political terms, then the more powerful the Bloc of National Minorities, the greater likelihood of a pogrom. In models 2 and 2I we measure Jewish and Polish nationalism not with the votes for their corresponding parties, but with the fraction of Jews and Poles that support each party under the assumption that Minorities' Bloc vote comes only from Jews (FJMinBloc) and the right-wing *Endecja* vote comes only from Poles (FPEndek). All models also include an interaction between the proportion of Jews and the corresponding indicator of Jewish nationalism. This is intended to capture the idea that the presence of many nationalist Jews poses an even greater threat to Poles than having either many Jews or many nationalists separately.

This table supports our claim that power-threat theory can account for the spatial distribution of pogroms, though the small sample sizes relative to the number of regressors suggest that the results should be considered tentative. First, indicators of Jewish threat are statistically significant across all four models: where Jews living in Jewish settlements supported parties calling for cultural and political autonomy, this produced a deadly effect because Poles considered this a threat to their political dominance. In models 1 and 1I, support for the Minorities' Bloc (FMinBloc) and in models 2 and 2I the interaction between Jewish population proportion and the fraction of Jews supporting the Minorities' Bloc (FJew*FJMinBloc) are each positively associated with pogrom occurrence. In each case the results are more certain after controlling for powiat-level socio-economic underdevelopment. Even ethnically tolerant Poles viewed the Bloc of National Minorities as a danger. The Piłsudskiites's efforts to undermine it were taken with exactly this concern in mind. When the interior ministry's chief of the political department Kazimierz Świtalski was dispatched to the Eastern borderlands in 1927 to meet with Jewish leaders, both he and his interlocutors could agree that Poles considered the Bloc an "anti-state organization" (Świtalski 1992, 215) In fact, most Poles considered

it anti-*Polish* and in the localities where it performed well that Poles were more likely to commit atrocities themselves, less likely to protect Jews from the predations of others, and less likely to aid Jews by preventing pogroms in the first place.

Second, the coefficients on support for the ethnically accommodationist party, the BBWR (FBBWR), are all the expected sign (positive) and are at or near conventional levels of statistical significance. Greater popularity of this party indicated a threat to Polish nationalists, who would ultimately respond with violence. The BBWR had a multiethnic constituency, so we are not able to assume that its vote came exclusively from either Jews, Poles, or Belarusians. Jewish support ought to have implied a willingness to forgo the nationalist demands of the Minorities Bloc. We return to the BBWR and the composition of its constituency further below.

There is slightly weaker support for the claim that pogroms are primarily about Polish nationalism (FEndek and FPEndek), though all the signs are in the right direction. This result is perhaps surprising given the importance that many pogrom narratives ascribe to Polish nationalism. At the same time, however, by saying that one could not predict where a pogrom would take place based on the strength of the local *Endecja* organization or its political support, we can better appreciate the surprise and shock, expressed in so many other narratives, that Poles with whom Jews had lived side by side and with whom they had gotten along reasonably well would, under the right conditions, turn on them.³ The environment conducive to pogroms was less one of Polish nationalism—for this was strong everywhere—than a large Jewish population calling for Polish recognition of its cultural and political rights.

The finding of communist support being negatively associated with pogroms runs counter to power-threat theory, which would predict a Polish nationalist backlash as a response to communism. But it confirms the descriptive results from Table 1— communist areas did indeed provide infertile ground for pogroms. This finding is ironic because among “Polish

³Shuster-Rozenblum’s 1946 testimony on Jasionówka: “It is a quiet life there, the market in the middle of the shtetl is peaceful with its church and several little Jewish shops, no markets or fairs, the village survived on hard, honest work....The Jewish and Polish workers live in harmony. Everyone has the same joys and sadness.” AŽIH 301-1274

nationalist” historians such as Wierzbicki (2007) it is an article of faith that pogroms were a matter of anti-Soviet rather than anti-Jewish actions. Yet 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 results show that quite the opposite is true. Communism immunizes against pogroms.

Who provided this immunizing effect? In previous work (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2003; 2011) we have shown that Jews did not vote communist in any area of Poland. In the provinces of Białystok and Polesie communist support came primarily from Belarusians. Communist support did not exceed 5 percent in the six municipalities in our sample with reports of Belarusian participation in pogroms. In a country where liberal universalism did not genuinely exist, communist universalism remained one of the few venues for inter-communal solidarity. German documents also make clear the reluctance of the Belarusians to join in pogroms. According to one frustrated Einsatzgruppe report from Belarusian areas: “Now as ever it is to be noted that the population on their own part refrains from any action against Jews” and continues by complaining the Belarusians “are not prepared to take part in any pogroms” (cited in Ainsztein 1974, 251).

To gauge the magnitude of the effects we compute the predicted probabilities of a pogrom occurrence conditional on different values for two key explanatory variables in model 2I, the interaction between Jewish support for the Minorities’ Bloc and the proportion of Jews in a settlement, and communist support. Although it is common practice to compute marginal effects based on values of regressors one standard deviation above and below the mean, in the present case we use the 10th and 90th percentiles, holding the other explanatory variables at their median values in the sample. It is necessary to employ the median and extreme percentile differences due to strong skewness in the data. The results are displayed in Table 3. Where large proportions of the Jews in Jewish areas support ethnic parties the probability of a pogrom reaches 14 percent, as compared with 7 percent where there are fewer Jews and more support non-ethnic parties. High communist support decreases the probability of a pogrom

	Pogrom Probability	
	10th ptile	90th ptile
J Support for MinBloc in J Places	7 (1,30)	14 (.1,67)
Comm Support	12 (2,33)	.6 (.02,3)

Table 3: Predicted probabilities of a pogrom given different values of key pogrom correlates. 95 percent confidence intervals are in parentheses.

from 12 to .6 percent. These are all substantial differences especially if we consider that the probability of a pogrom in the median locality is only 7 percent. Of course the deadliest communities for Jews were those where these factors interacted: in places where there were lots of Jews, lots of support for the Minorities Bloc, lots of Polish nationalists and illiterates, but few communists, the probability of a pogrom reaches 40 percent.

Pogrom Dynamics and the Jewish Threat

How did Polish perceptions of a Jewish threat play out in the context of a pogrom? The results suggest that whatever the identity of the perpetrators, localities where Jews were already perceived as a threatening "Other"—places with large numbers of Jews who opted for Jewish parties—provided fertile ground for anti-Jewish violence. As Stola (2001, 2004) notes, the pogroms involved a great deal of participation, both "active" and "passive." Where the population felt a sense of ethnic threat, 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—Szcuczyn, on June 25, 1941, in which approxi-

mately 300 Jews were killed by local Poles—may help illustrate the underlying causal relationships we seek to illuminate and the complex mix of emotions at work. Chaya Soika-Golding, one of the local Jewish survivors from the war, described the events in a letter to a friend immediately after the war from safe refuge in the West. 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—Shvialovski, chief of the guard and Yankayitis, the director of the school, and dothors. They were full of rancor for the Bolsheviks and the Jews. Friday night 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 Kheytshe 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 goyim immediately washed the bloodied floors including the stones on the street. A few hundred sacrifices had taken place and still, the murders informed us, the massacres would continue for two more nights" (Destruction 1954/1987, 10-11)⁴.

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 third for revenge, blood, and booty, and ultimately the intimate violence perpetrated by people well known to the victims are all contained within this short narrative. To the extent that this pogrom followed the pattern of others, the primary victims in the first round were adult males. 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 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

⁴For a similar narrative on Szczyczyn see that of Bashe Katsper in AZIH 301-1958.

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 a while.

The 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. Neither lifted a finger or show any sign of solidarity with their fellow citizens. The women did not encounter hatred in their demarches (although there was much to be found in the street); 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 importance of the context: In Szczuczyn, a town where 56% of the 4,502 inhabitants were Jewish, 88 percent of whom voted for Jewish parties in 1922 and 85 percent in 1928, and where the communists attracted a mere 2 percent of the vote, Poles most likely viewed Jews as a threat to their cultural and political dominance and the stage was set for a pogrom.

The narrative and our interpretation of it also sheds light on what in the literature is considered the critical position of the Catholic priests and the local intelligentsia. In fact, within Holocaust historiography more generally, crimes and salvation are frequently cast in terms

of individual character—victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and saviors. As important as such a perspective is for establishing individual innocence and guilt, our analysis, by focussing on the local context in which pogroms did or did not occur, suggests that in many cases (though clearly not all) it was either easier or much more difficult to do the right thing. Shimon Datner, in his account of one of the most deadly and brutal pogroms of the region, which took place in Radziłów, writes that once the German military had pulled out of the shtetl,

the scent of massacre is in the air...The situation would not be so desperate, were it not for the outspoken and hostile behavior of the local Poles....Finally people try one more thing: the local Catholic priest, Aleksander Dagalevski, is the greatest authority among the Radziłów Poles and Mrs. Finkelstein is a close acquaintance of his. She goes to him in order to persuade him to exert influence on his parishioners, and get them to cease perpetrating their outrages. Mrs. Finkelstein goes on her holy errand and receives the answer that all Jews, great and small, are communists, and that he has no interest in protecting them. To the question how small children could be guilty of anything, he answer that they aren't really guilty, but that he can't put in any good word for the Jews, because his won sheep would toss him in the mud. The holy man's answer shook the shtetl's Jews, and revealed to them the hopelessness of the situation.

Delegations of Jews turned to the elite of the town with the same request "but everyone everywhere shrugged, evaded, and avoided giving a clear response" (AZIH 1994). Datner also mentions the town's only doctor who turned away the Jewish injured and other officials who refused to "swim against the tide." This narrative suggests that rather than casting priests and the local intelligentsia as either heros or villains in order to account for where pogroms did or did not happen, a great deal can be learned by examining more closely the political contexts in which they lived. In Radziłów, where virtually every eligible Jewish voter voted for Jewish parties in 1928 and of the Polish electorate 42 percent supported the *Endecja* in the same election, it was indeed exceedingly difficult to generate the bare minimum of solidarity between the two communities that the town's Polish intelligentsia might have drawn upon to prevent a pogrom.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the distribution of intimate anti-Jewish violence in Northeastern Poland in summer 1941 cannot be explained by the role of the Germans, the crimes of the Soviet occupation, or even Polish nationalism, even though all of these were certainly necessary conditions. Instead our analysis points more to the failure of the Polish state to integrate its Jewish citizens and the decision of many Jews to opt for the politics of ethnic particularism, to vote for parties that would press for their rights as Jews. This finding should not be interpreted as blaming the victim. Jewish support for the Bloc of National Minorities did not mean implacable resistance to integrating into Poland's social and political life. Representatives of the parties of minorities in Poland's 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 the "Polish" parties (primarily the PPS and the BBWR), in the end not one Jewish (or Ukrainian, Belarusian, or German) cabinet member 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.

Poles nevertheless considered the Jewish vote for Jewish parties as proof of the Jews's unwillingness to integrate into Polish political life. This logic is consistent with the power-threat theory, according to which Poles in localities with a large Jewish population calling for a recognition of Jewish communal autonomy and rights would view their neighbors as an ethnic threat. At the same time, this sense of threat could be mitigated by the presence of a sturdy communist organization that organized local Poles and Belarusians into the politics of universalism.

The chapter also points to the potential theoretical importance of political assimilation in fostering the absolute minimum of solidarity necessary for preventing intercommunal violence. Although the term assimilation has a checkered history in social science, our analysis

suggests that it may be worth invoking in a revised form (Brubaker 2001), an issue to which we return later in this study. Assimilation in politics need not be thought of as changing something as fundamental as "identity" but, rather as a new willingness or opportunity to engage in an act as simple and mundane as joining with fellow citizens in supporting the same political party. In this limited sense, this chapter is consonant with the findings of Varshney (2002), who extols the advantages of interethnic civic engagement. By highlighting the vote and politics, however, as opposed to the thicker ties of civil society, our threshold for preventing violence may be even lower than that considered by Varshney. Given the strength of anti-Semitic nationalism in much of Northeast Poland and the highly permissive conditions provided by the Nazi invasion, our analysis paradoxically shows that it was extraordinarily difficult to start pogroms and actually required very little to prevent them.

Why should political assimilation prevent pogroms? Where minorities are better integrated, they are presumably less despised, looked upon with less indifference, and more likely to be thought of as part of the community. Within all communities in Poland before summer 1941 there were undoubtedly people who respected their Jewish neighbors; equally all communities within Poland had what Brass called "riot specialists" who were ready for violence. Surviving and preventing pogroms may have depended more on the presence of friends from other groups than on "enemies," and it was harder to find those friends where the bare minimum of social solidarity was missing. Our analysis shows where this solidarity was to be found and the conditions that either produced it or failed to do so.

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