Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Northeastern Poland, Summer 1941

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Draft Introductory Book Chapter
September 25, 2011
In this chapter we turn to an analysis of 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 affirms the broad utility of power threat theory. The louder the Jewish call for cultural autonomy and the greater the popularity of parties such as the BBWR that advocated inter-ethnic cooperation, the greater the perceived threat to Poles who sought a nationally homogeneous state and the more likely a pogrom.

We begin the chapter with an overview of social, political, and military conditions in Białystok and Polesie on the eve of the pogroms. Conditions were ripe for pogroms: the hated Soviet regime melted away and with it the violent suppression of Polish nationalism, and the German army and Einsatzgruppen were slowly establishing control. 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 German Presence

It is important to recall that most of the pogroms discussed in this book occurred during a six week period following the German invasion of the Soviet occupied eastern borderlands on June 22, 1941. It was a period of near statelessness. The German Army Group Centre moved through the northeastern borderlands exceptionally quickly. One week into the campaign, German units had encircled and destroyed Soviet forces deployed in the Białystok salient and had advanced beyond Minsk to the edge of the Pripyet marshes (Stahel 2009, 192). In the
face of this onslaught, public authority at the local level collapsed, as local communist and
police officials evacuated with the retreating Soviet forces.

In most towns local Poles replaced the departed Soviet officials, and, with German permi-
sion, temporarily carried out both political and police functions for the first several weeks. But the general political situation remained chaotic. Throughout the Bialystok and Polesia
voivodships, German army units stopped in communities primarily to raise their flag, leave
a small field troop, and then push on. According to the account of Yehoshua Kales, who
survived the war hidden by a Christian in the town of Siemiatycze, "Overall, the Poles had
all the power in their hands for the first couple of weeks." (AZIH 301-1463). The pattern and
degrees of German involvement varied from place to place. A survivor account from Rokitno
in Polesia voivodship, describes how the pogrom unfolded there:

"The Soviet authorities remained in Rokitno until June 29, 1941, as well as units of the
Red army. The last to withdraw was the sapper detachment, which blew up the railway
bridge and burned down several other objects. The town was then left entirely without au-
thorities. On the night of July 3, the local Poles attacked and robbed Jewish houses. The
Jews resisted, and a struggle developed during which one fell victim, whom the murder-
ers killed boards....Among the local murderers, the following distinguished themselves: the
Volksdeutsche Retslov and the Pole Krukowski. At the same time a local police force of Poles
was established. Retslov was appointed its commdant. No Germans had yet appeared in
Rokitno." (AZIH 301-3179).

It was not for "a couple of weeks," the narrative continues until the "three SS men arrived
in Rokitno from Rarnow and began to throw their weight around in true Hitlerite fashion." Although in some places German forces attempted to instigate pogroms, in other towns, such
as Rokitno, deadly pogroms occurred before the Germans even arrived.

The Wehrmacht itself was trailed by SS units, known as the Einsatzgruppen. These
units were tasked with killing communists and Jews. The problem they confronted was
one of scale. In the areas covered in this chapter in the northeast portion of Poland SS-
Gruppenführer Arthur Nebe’s Einsatzgruppe B deployed less than 700 soldiers in a region
with over 225,000 Jews. According to Edmund Dmitrów: “The task of the Einsatzgruppen
confronted its leadership with the problem that the size of their own forces was limited com-
pared to that of the Jewish population.” (Dmitrów 2004, 122). Furthermore, the speed with which regular German military units moved across Western Belarus forced Nebe’s to move along with them. By the first week of July, Nebe’s main units had already left Western Belarus and were located in Minsk. Small sub-units of the Einsatzgruppen remained in the area but they were very thin on the ground. This is one reason why the SS-leadership decided to permit anti-communist and anti-Semitic elements from the local Polish and Belarusian populations to engage in “self-cleansing” actions. As noted in the introduction, however, their efforts to encourage pogroms met with only limited success.

Legacy of Soviet Occupation

Soviet repression was experienced by the local population in a number of important ways. According to Gurianov, on the territory of Western Belarus, 44,981 people were arrested during the Soviet occupation. Many were accused of having supported anti-communist resistance movements and others were arrested for crimes ranging from membership in illegal organizations to economic ”speculation” to crossing the Soviet-German border illegally. Of those arrested 48.9% were Poles, 24.2% were Jews, and 18.3 percent were Belarusians. (Bockowski p.207). These numbers on their own do not suggest that Soviet repression disproportionately affected Poles over other ethnic groups. In addition to arrests, several thousand inhabitants were deported to the interior of the Soviet Union. Deportations occurred in four waves. In February 1940, landowners, civilians, military personnel who had received land for taking part in the struggle for independence, as well as foresters and their families were the primary victims. In the second wave, in April 1940, the families of those previously jailed, of those in hiding, or those who had fled across the border were shipped eastward. In June 1940, Polish nationals who had fled the German occupation were deported. Whereas the earlier deportations had targeted mostly Poles, this third round focused primarily on Jews. On June 20th a final round of deportations was initiated, primarily of Poles those
who had worked in the anti-Soviet underground, as well as families of landowners, police-
men, and higher officials of independent Poland, but this last action was never completed
because of the Soviet invasion. (Wierzbicki p.32)

During the Soviet occupation, perhaps even more fateful for inter-ethnic relations than
the arrests and deportations were the dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of govern-
ment, public administration, and the police. These were spheres that had been completely
dominated by Poles, but in both the Bialystok and Polesia regions Jews and especially Belaruu-
sians took up strong positions in all of these sectors. By October 1, 1940, for example, in the
Bialystok region Bockowski estimates that there were somewhere between 9,000 and 12,000
people working in the state administration. Of these approximately 3900 were Belarusians,
3104 were Russians, 1420 were Jewish, and 613 other nationalities. This represented a dra-
matic break with the past. By the end of 1940, within the Bialystok district communist party
organization committee, 48 Belarusians, 14 Russians, 13 Jews, and 2 Poles were employed
full time (Bockowski 109). Perhaps even more significant were changes at the lower level. At
the Bialystok Pedagogical Institute in the Class admitted in March 1940 spaces were allotted
by nationality with a clear preference for Belarusians and Jews over Poles: 25 Belarusians, 22
Poles, 18 Jews, and 4 Russians matriculated for the fall (Bockowski 128).

It is important to note that preference for Belarusians and Jews over Poles in predomi-
nantly Polish areas began to change in fall 1940 (p.140), when orders came down from Minsk
to increase the number of local Poles in state and party positions. From the standpoint of
ethnic relations, however, the damage had already been done. The state administration and
civil service, which had earlier been “owned” by Poles, were now in the hands of a multi-
ethnic political elite. On the eve of the German invasion, the 3rd battalion of the Red army
stationed near the town of Ostryn sent a report up the chain of command noting: “According
to the information of the local population, with regards to the moving of troops of the
Red Army, Polish counterrevolutionary elements are spreading rumors about the Red Army
leaving Western Belarus and they are threatening the Belarusian and Jewish population with
"revenge" (Wierzbicki p.34). Multiple Jewish survivor reports note that those just released from Soviet prisons were strongly represented among pogrom perpetrators (AZIH 301-1858; Destruction of the Jews of Szczuczyn, 7). But most administrators stationed from the interior of the Soviet Union had fled with the retreating Soviet authorities, leaving the local Belarusian and Jewish population vulnerable to retribution for the ordeal of the preceding 21 months.

Anti-Semitic Polish Nationalism

As noted in the Introduction, both historians and survivors 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." (AZIH 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." (AZIH 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" (AZIH 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 voivodeship 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 Skladkowski 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).
Perceived Jewish Threat

One of the most important political vehicles of the Jewish struggle for cultural autonomy was the Bloc of National Minorities, an electoral alliance that drew together all of the country’s major national minorities—Germans, Jews, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. As described by Mendelsohn (1983, pp. 53-54), the Bloc 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. Indeed, given the minorities’ demographic weight and the fractionalizes Polish political spectrum, it could conceivably have been the largest parliamentary party. The Bloc could and sometimes did hold the balance of power, as occurred when the country’s minorities supported the Left’s candidate for the subsequently assassinated President, Gabriel Narutowicz. The strong performance of the Bloc in the 1922 elections shocked Polish public opinion and seemed to confirm the worst fears of Poles that the country’s national minorities were either unassimilable or disloyal.

In northeastern Poland the key player within the Bloc was the General Zionist Party, led by Yitzhak Grünbaum. The General Zionists spanned the religious/secular divided, incorporated both workers and businessmen, and, despite all of the bluster about Hebrew (a language spoken by very few Polish Jews), its newspapers were published and party meetings were conducted in Yiddish as well as Polish. It is therefore probably best thought of as a Jewish “catch-all” party that took aim at the “center” of the Jewish electorate. Although the Zionism’s goal was a Jewish state in Palestine, for the General Zionists day-to-day politics involved pressing demands for Jewish cultural and political rights and autonomy. The Bloc was seen both by Jews and Poles as his creature and a vehicle for the Zionist program (this especially so, after the orthodox Agudas Yisroel decided to field its own list in 1928).
Poles of the both the Left and the Right viewed Zionism as a danger because of the threat it posed to the establishment of a nationally homogeneous Polish state. According to Mendelsohn (1981), “the origins of the Zionists’ support for the so-called minorities bloc resided in their conviction that Poland must be transformed from a nation-state into a multinational state and their search for allies in the struggle to maintain this goal.” For the Polish Left, Zionists represented a failure of the project of assimilation and a return to Jewish medieval separatism. For the Polish Right, Zionism was seen as a “step toward the creation within Poland of a ‘Jewish state...’” (Mendelsohn 1981, 14). The General Zionists did not constitute the same irredentist threat as parties representing Germans, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, but in some ways the threat they posed was more intractable: since the Jews were urban and literate, the Zionist appeal represented a threat to precisely those modern sectors of the economy and polity that the Poles hoped to dominate. The Zionists’ calls for government funded Jewish schools in Hebrew and Yiddish, a transformation of Jewish communal organizations, the kehilot, from purely religious institutions to democratic political ones, and other forms of Jewish extraterritorial autonomy were opposed by Polish governments of all political stripes. This fear of a Jewish “state within a state” was repeated time and again, not only in the literature of the Polish right but also, after 1935, in the platform of the otherwise centrist Peasant Party (Cang 1939, 249).

Even ethnically tolerant Poles viewed the Bloc of National Minorities as a danger. The Pilsudskiítes efforts to undermine it were taken with exactly this concern in mind. When the Interior Ministry’s chief its of its political department, Kazimierz Świtalski, was dispatched to the Eastern borderlands in 1927 to meet with Jewish leaders in an effort to discourage the formation of the Bloc for the upcoming national elections in 1928, both he and his interlocutors could agree that Poles considered the Bloc an “anti-state organization” (Świtalski 1992, 215). Although Świtalski’s efforts bore some fruit in Eastern Galicia (to be addressed in the next chapter), in this part of Poland his efforts failed. The Bloc combined the strengths of the Jewish and Belarusian electorate in 1928, and Zionism increased its appeal and itself grew
more strident during the 1930s.

In what follows, we show that pogrom localities differed in important ways from those towns and villages where pogroms did not occur. Pogroms were more likely to occur 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. The utility of this exercise is that it offers prima facie evidence for our argument without imposing any statistical assumptions. Table 1 reports median values for a range of the most important demographic and political characteristics across the Białystok and Polesia voivodships.

Even a cursory examination of the table shows that there is some 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. Yet no pogrom occurred in any settlement with fewer than 360 Jews (Wasosz). 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.

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? One possibility is that where Poles were a minority they felt too insecure to initiate a pogrom. A second possibility, and one that we turn to shortly, concerns Belarusian support for communism and its immunizing effects against pogroms.

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

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

2 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 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.
Table 1: Median Values of Basic Demographic and Political Characteristics of Pogrom and Non-Pogrom Localities. Source: census data and authors’ computation.

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<tr>
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<th>Pogrom</th>
<th>No Pogrom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polish 21</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish 21</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox 21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jews 21</td>
<td>1574</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop 21</td>
<td>5290</td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bund 28</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orth Jew List 28</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min Bloc 28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endecja 28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comms 28</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Support 4 Bund 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>J Support 4 Orth 28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Support 4 Min Bloc 28</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Support 4 Endecja 28</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>296</td>
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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 form 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 lots of Jews, where there is greater 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 hypothesis explains the distribution of pogroms: pogroms were most likely to occur where Jewish calls for cultural autonomy and the popularity of ethnically accommodationist political parties were widespread enough to threaten Polish plans for a nationally homogeneous state.

Our empirical strategy differs somewhat from standard approaches to power-threat theory (e.g., Tolnay and Beck (1995)), which model threat as a function solely of minority population share and the vote shares of ethnically tolerant parties. We include the basic specification, but add two extensions. The first is an interaction term between minority demographics and the vote share for ethnically tolerant parties. If each of these separately is perceived as a threat, then the two together should be particularly threatening. Our indicators of these are the fraction of the 1921 population that is Jewish (FJew), the fraction of the 1928 vote received by the Bloc of National Minorities (FMinBloc), and the interaction between the two (FJew*FMinBloc). The second extension incorporates the assumption, incorporated into the bottom third of Table 1, that only Jews supported the Bloc of National Minorities. We use the fraction of Jews that supported the Bloc of National Minorities (FJMinBloc) as an alternative to the vote share of the Bloc (FMinBloc) as an indicator of political threat, and also include an interaction with the fraction of Jews (FJew*FJMinBloc). If Poles saw Jews in general as a potential threat, then they must have viewed nationalist Jews as an even larger threat.

Both the communists (FComm) and Marshal Piłsudski’s BBWR (FBBWR) advocated Polish accommodation with the ethnic minorities, and power-threat theory would predict a pos-
itive relationship between support for those parties and a pogrom. It should be noted that arguments that attribute pogroms to Polish revenge for Jewish collaboration with the Soviet occupation also predict a positive relationship between pogroms and communist support, so the statistical analysis alone may not disentangle the two explanations. The BBWR was also multi-ethnic. Poland was divided on nationality questions not only between ethnic groups but, perhaps even more fatefuly, within them. Ethnic Poles disagreed among themselves about the most prudent course of action regarding the country’s minority population. Since Polish nationalists advocated assimilation for the Belarusians and discrimination for the country’s Jews, those villages where Poles and Belarusians supported Piłsudski more strongly would should be especially threatening to the Endecja. In these settlements, the power-threat hypothesis tells us, Poles should be especially keen to attack Jews in order to forestall any need to acknowledge Jewish rights. Logic tells us that this effect was curvilinear: where the BBWR gained no support, clearly it did not constitute a threat to local nationalists; where it was dominant, nationalists were too weak to initiate anything. It is in the middle range, where the vast majority of localities are found, that the rising popularity of the BBWR among Poles and Belarusians should have stiffened the resolve of local nationalists to poison the atmosphere and pave the way for pogroms.

We proxy Polish nationalism with the proportion of the 1928 vote Endecja received (FEndek) and, through the assumption that its support came solely from Poles, the fraction of Poles that voted for Endecja (FPEndek). Arguments emphasizing the importance of Polish nationalism would predict a positive correlation with the probability of a pogrom.

Recall from Chapter 1 that economic arguments for pogroms claim they were more about economic competition and plunder than about racism or revenge. Narratives of actual pogroms lend support to this hypothesis. Peteu 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.)

We test economic arguments with two different indicators. The dummy variable Shtetl identifies small market towns where Jews tended to occupy higher-status occupations than their peasant neighbors and Jewish-Gentile relations could be especially fraught. We follow Bauer (2009) in defining a shtetl as a municipality with a population of at least 15,000, of which at least 30 percent was Jewish. If pogroms are about economic competition or plunder, then they should be most common in the shtetls, where competition was fierce and wealth differentials great. The other indicator is illiteracy, which was higher among Poles than among Jews, and was correlated with standard of living. The argument about plunder would predict pogroms to be the most common in places that were the most illiterate.

We present four logit models. Models 1 and 1I employ raw vote shares for the strength of Jewish nationalism (FMinBloc) and Polish nationalism (FEndek). Models 2 and 2I incorporate the assumption that vote for the Bloc of National Minorities came only from Jews and that vote for Endecja came only from Poles. The indicators of Jewish and Polish nationalism for models 2 and 2I are the fraction of Jews supporting the Bloc of National Minorities (FJMin-Bloc) and the fraction of Poles supporting Endecja (FPEndek), respectively. The “I” models indicate the inclusion of Illiteracy. 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.

The results are displayed in Table 2. The magnitudes of the coefficients are not easily
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Model 1I</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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<td>(1.3)</td>
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<td>(1.1)</td>
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<td>(1.3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>(1.1)</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>113</td>
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</table>

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 $p < 0.1$.

interpretable in logit, but the signs are more meaningful. Table 2 broadly affirms that power-threat theory can account for at least some of the spatial distribution of pogroms. First, indicators of Jewish threat are statistically significant and generally in the expected direction (positive) across all four models. Although this is true for the proportion Jews (FJew) in only one model, the popularity of the Minorities’ Bloc (FMinBloc) is positive and significant in models 1 and 1I, and the interaction between fraction Jews and the fraction of Jews support-
ing the Minorities’ Bloc is positive and significant in models 2 and 2I. (As we shall see below, when marginal effects are reported, the negative coefficients on FJew*FMinBloc in models 1 and 1I are washed out by the positive coefficient of the main effect, FMinBloc.) Support is somewhat weaker for the related hypothesis that the popularity of the ethnically accommodationist BBWR (FBBWR) provoked Poles to commit pogroms. The coefficient is positive and significant in models 1 and 1I, but insignificant in models 2 and 2I. Power-threat theory does not require that every component of the Jewish threat be individually important, only that components be jointly important.

The largely negative relationship between communist support (FComm) and the occurrence of a pogrom runs counter to power-threat theory, 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 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).

Arguments attributing pogroms to Polish nationalism also find weak support. Although the signs on FEndek and FPEndek are in the right direction (positive), they reach conventional levels of significance only in model 2I. 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.

Finally, there is mixed evidence for economic arguments. Models 1I and 2I are multi-level because Illiteracy data are available only for powiats, which were the next administrative level above municipalities. The positive and significant coefficients in these models mean that powiats with high illiteracy tended to experience more pogroms than powiats with low illiteracy. This is consistent with the hypothesis that illiterate (and poor) peasant communities provided more fertile ground than other places for pogroms, but provides no information on whether the places within powiats where pogroms took place tended themselves to feature high illiteracy. The Shtetl variable, by contrast, is measured at the municipality level, and its coefficients are insignificant across all four models.

To gauge the magnitude some of the effects we compute the predicted probabilities of a pogrom occurrence conditional on different values of the three main Jewish threat variables: the fraction of Jews (FJew), the fraction supporting the Minorities’ Bloc (FMinBloc), and their interaction (FJew*FMinBloc) in model 1; and the fraction of Jews (FJew), the fraction sup-

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.” AZIH 301-1274
Table 3: Predicted probabilities of a pogrom given different values of key pogrom correlates. 95 percent confidence intervals are in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1 Threat</th>
<th>Pogrom Probability 10th ptile</th>
<th>Pogrom Probability 90th ptile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.9)</td>
<td>(3.45)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 2 Threat</th>
<th>Pogrom Probability 10th ptile</th>
<th>Pogrom Probability 90th ptile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.13)</td>
<td>(5.24)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although it is common practice to compute marginal effects based on values of regressors one standard deviation above and below the mean, that does not provide much information in the present case, where there is strong skewness in the data. Instead we use the 25th and 75th percentiles, holding the other explanatory variables at their median values in the sample.

The results are displayed in Table 3. The probability of a pogrom dramatically increased as the value of the three main threat variables increase from the 25th percentile to the 75th percentile. For model 1 the probability more than quintuples (from 3 percent to 17 percent) while in model 2 it triples (from 4 to 12 percent). This is a strong effect given that pogrom occurred in under 10 percent of all municipalities. Of course the deadliest communities for Jews were those where several factors other factors also militated in favor of a pogrom. We do not show it in the table, but where the proportion of Jews, support for the Minorities’ Bloc, and support for the accommodationist BBWR were at the 75th percentile, and support for the communists was at the 25th percentile, then the probability of a pogrom reached 27 percent in model 1.

**Discussion**

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. 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 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—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 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 Kheytse 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).

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.

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


Destruction of the Jewish Community of Szczuczyn. 1954 [1987]. Tel Aviv: Former Residents of Szczuczyn.


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