

Interstate Conflict and Ethnic Cleansing

Abstract

Introduction

What is ethnic cleansing? This chapter provides a critical overview of the existing literature, defines the concept of ethnic cleansing, and justifies the particular definition used throughout the study. The operational definition of ethnic cleansing used in the thesis is “a state policy that exterminates or forcefully and permanently deports at least twenty percent of an ethnic group on the state’s territory from their current location to another one.”

Chapter 1: Interstate Territorial Competition and Ethnic Cleansing

This chapter develops a theory of ethnic cleansing and tests it using a dataset that I have compiled. The theory connects interstate territorial competition to ethnic cleansing in two steps. First, I propose that interstate territorial disputes lead to alliances between expansionist states and the minority ethnic groups in the target states. Expansionist states seek allies among the minority groups either before they attack the territory, to increase their chances of occupying it or, during an occupation, to successfully control it. Second, I argue that these alliances generate a policy of ethnic cleansing by radicalizing moderate leaders of the majority ethnic group or by enhancing the political power of radical leaders.

Contrary to conventional explanations, which emphasize the role of ethnic differences, my theory claims that polarization between minority and majority ethnic groups is the result of interstate competition over territory rather than of longstanding ethnic differences. To further this argument, the chapter also considers two potential ways in which ethnic motivations might play an indirect role in the causal process outlined above. The first possibility is that minorities that have neighboring homelands are more likely to be victims of ethnic cleansing because states are more likely to claim territories populated by their co-ethnics. The chapter deals with this possibility by exploring the relationship between the existence of a neighboring homeland and the likelihood of ethnic cleansing. The findings suggest that the existence of a homeland makes it easier to deport minority groups but it does not lead to the original decision to use ethnic cleansing. The second possibility is that minority groups with deeper differences from the majority are more open to forming alliances with expansionist states. The empirical analysis in this chapter cannot resolve this problem entirely; hence the issue is taken up in detail in the case studies in Chapter 2.

To test my theory against alternative explanations that stress the role of ethnic differences, I generated an original dataset of minority-state dyads in Europe between 1900 and 1950. This dataset includes indicators for the depth of ethnic differences between minority and majority groups, for the alliances between minority groups and expansionist states, as well as for control variables such as the existence of a neighboring homeland for the minority groups. The results of the analyses are in line with the expectations of my theory. I find that minorities that are located in zones of interstate conflict are more likely to be ethnically cleansed than other minority groups. I also find that the minority groups that were allied to expansionist states are much more likely to face ethnic cleansing compared to other minority groups. The analyses also suggest a

correlation between ethnic divisions and the alliances between expansionist states and minority groups. However, the question of exactly how ethnic divisions play a role in the formation of these alliances is answered in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Historical Evidence: Interstate Competition, Minority Collaboration, and Radicalization of the Majority

This chapter has two goals. The first goal is to understand the nature of the link between ethnic divisions and the formation of alliances between minority groups and expansionist states. The second goal is to demonstrate how alliances between minorities and expansionist states radicalize the politicians from the majority and thereby lead to the decision to use ethnic cleansing.

There are basically two potential ways in which ethnic divisions might play a role in the formation of minority-expansionist state alliances. First, the leaders of the minority groups with salient differences from the majority might volunteer to form alliances with the expansionist states. Such a finding would imply that ethnic motivations do play an important, though indirect, role in the process that leads to ethnic cleansing. Second, expansionist states might select minority groups that have salient differences from the majority because these groups are better organized and hence are more useful as allies. Once this selection is made the expansionist state might obtain the approval of the minority leadership through several means. During peacetime, the expansionist state might provide financial and covert military aid to those minority leaders which support an alliance. During an occupation, the expansionist state might insert overt coercion on those minority leaders that are reluctant to enter an alliance. If the “selection” story depicts the formation of minority-rival state alliances accurately then one would conclude that motivations inspired by considerations of ethnicity do not play an important role in this process.

The second goal of the chapter is to illustrate the causal mechanisms suggested in Chapter 1. The theory argues that in the absence of interstate competition most politicians from the majority group concentrate on issues other than the minority groups and favor a policy that falls short of completely excluding them. It further suggests that minority-rival state alliances change this situation by radicalizing the opinions of the mainstream majority politicians or by boosting the support for radical leaders.

To achieve these goals I study four minority-state dyads: the Germans in inter-war Czechoslovakia, the Ukrainians and Germans in inter-war Poland, and the Greeks in Ottoman Turkey. The findings support the argument that minority leadership becomes receptive to collaboration only as a result of considerable intervention from expansionist states. For example, in Czechoslovakia and Poland, substantial financial aid from Germany to parties that favored German expansionism eventually increased the clout of these parties among the Germans. In Poland, the German occupation eliminated the moderate leadership of the Ukrainians and left the most radical faction of Ukrainian nationalists as the sole leaders of this minority. Finally, in Ottoman territories, intervention from mainland Greece not only shaped the Greek leadership but also played a crucial role in raising a specifically Greek consciousness among the Orthodox population of the Empire.

Chapter 3: Erroneous Predictions

This chapter focuses on the cases in which my theory makes erroneous predictions. The goal is to understand if upon closer inspection the logic of the theory can explain some of these cases.

The first type of erroneous prediction includes the cases in which the theory expects to observe ethnic cleansing but ethnic cleansing does not happen. For example, these are the cases in which the minority had been in alliance with an occupying state but after the occupation the home state did not use ethnic cleansing against the minority. The cases in this category that I consider are the Albanians in Yugoslavia and the Bretons in France after the Second World War. My preliminary argument is that in these cases the minority changed allies during the occupation or the original alliance had little or no impact on the majority.

The second category includes the cases in which the theory fails to predict the occurrence of ethnic cleansing. These cases can be further divided into two. First, there are instances in which the state is occupied or attacked but it uses ethnic cleansing against a minority that was not in alliance with the belligerent state. Examples for such cases include the deportation of Volga Germans in the Soviet Union in 1941 and the forced exchange of populations between Bulgaria and Romania after the annexation of Southern Dobruja in 1940. I argue that the expectation of minority collaboration played an important role in these cases. Second, there are also a limited number of cases in which a state uses ethnic cleansing despite the fact that it has not been attacked or occupied by another state. Within this category, the Holocaust is the most problematic case for my theory and, consequently, I devote considerable attention to this case in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Macro-Regional Comparison and Out-of-Sample Testing

This chapter evaluates the extent to which my theory travels to contexts outside of Europe. To do so it focuses on two issues. First, it inquires whether or not the theory can account for the distribution of ethnic cleansing cases across different regions of the world. Second, it assesses the ability of the theory to account for ethnic cleansing in the post-1950 world.

The main argument of the dissertation is that the fundamental cause of ethnic cleansing is territorial conflicts between states or state-like actors. Since interstate territorial conflict is essentially a regional rather than a national level phenomenon, the theory also has testable implications for the distribution of ethnic cleansing cases across different regions of the world. Theories of international relations propose several factors that explain why certain regions and periods are more prone to territorial conflict than others. These factors include exogenous ones such as population density as well as proximate ones such as balance of power between status-quo and expansionist states or general instability due to the collapse of large empires. The expectation of this chapter is that in regions where these factors increase the likelihood of interstate territorial conflict, the likelihood of ethnic cleansing for any given group should also be higher.

The empirical section of the chapter uses a new list of ethnic cleansing cases in the world between 1950 and 2005 that I have compiled. To make sure that the data on different periods and regions are comparable, the criteria used to collect these cases are the same as the one in Chapter 1. The chapter then compares the probability of ethnic cleansing in regions where interstate territorial conflicts have been rare (such as cold-war

Europe, Africa, North/South America) with those where such conflicts were ubiquitous (Central and Eastern Europe up to mid-20th century). To identify which regions are more prone to territorial conflicts I use direct measurements of “interstate territorial conflict” that exist in the literature as well as indirect predictors of territorial conflicts derived from theories of international relations. The findings indeed suggest that ethnic cleansing was considerably more likely in Central and Eastern Europe during 1900-1950 than it has been in other regions of the world, including highly heterogeneous ones such as Africa, since the Second World War.

The empirical section also tests the theory developed in Chapter 1 using the data from 1950-2005. Compiling quality data on the independent variables for all the group-state dyads in the world throughout the 1950-2005 period is highly difficult and time consuming. Hence, I use a dataset that comprises the positive cases of ethnic cleansing in this period and a comparable number of randomly selected negative cases.

Chapter 5: Macro-level Territorial Conflict and Micro-Level Variation during Episodes of Ethnic Cleansing: Evidence from Prijedor, Bosnia

This chapter deals with a slightly different dependent variable than the decision to use ethnic cleansing: the variation in the levels of violence among sub-national units during ethnic cleansing campaigns. The goal of the chapter is to clarify the implications of my theory for this dependent variable and test them against the alternatives. The data used in the chapter comes from the field research that I undertook in the municipality of Prijedor in Bosnia-Herzegovina. My work mainly involved conducting interviews in the villages of Prijedor and gathering information from local newspaper archives, NGOs, and government institutions.

The theory developed in Chapter 1 implies that the relations between ethnic groups become polarized when groups find themselves at the opposite sides of a territorial conflict between two states or state-like actors. The general conflict in Bosnia was between the three nationalist parties [Party of Democratic Action (SDA) for the Muslims, Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) for the Serbs, and the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ) for the Croats]. However, in Prijedor, the territorial competition was mainly between the SDA and the SDS. By contrast, the HDZ, which dominated in the Croat villages, did not have substantial territorial claims in Prijedor. In addition, not all Muslim villages in Prijedor persistently supported the SDA: some preferred reformed communists or refrained from joining the SDA-organized resistance against the Serbs. If the nature of the territorial competition in Prijedor indeed influenced the interethnic relations then two predictions should hold. First, the relations between the Serbs and non Serbs should have deteriorated more in areas where the non-Serbs supported the SDA compared to areas where they supported some other party such as the HDZ or the reformists. Second, given the deterioration in the relations, the local Serbs should have been less willing to protect the non-Serbs in the SDA-supporting villages; thereby causing higher levels of violence in these areas.

The alternative explanation for the variation in the levels of violence relates to the interethnic relations which preceded the emergence of the territorial conflict in Prijedor. The argument is as follows. For reasons such as geographical proximity or past violence, in some villages and regions the relations between Serbs and non-Serbs were better than others to start with. In such regions the Serbs were more willing to aid and protect the

non-Serbs and hence the levels of violence were also lower during the ethnic cleansing campaign.

The empirical section uses two methods: first, regression analysis, where the dependent variable is the proportion of missing persons in each non-Serb village; second, qualitative comparison of two regions within Prijedor, which were similar in critical respects but experienced substantially different treatment during the ethnic cleansing campaign. In the statistical analysis, the indicators for SDA-support consistently do better in explaining the variation in violence than the indicators for pre-conflict relations with the Serbs. The qualitative comparison also backs this finding and highlights the specific way in which territorial competition between macro actors affected interethnic relations and the distribution of violence in Prijedor.

Conclusions

The conventional view on ethnic cleansing argues that the root cause of this phenomenon is the nature of interethnic relations, which are largely endogenous to the historical development of ethnic differences. My dissertation turns the conventional explanations on their head: it argues that the deterioration of the relations between ethnic groups, which eventually leads to ethnic cleansing, is explained by territorial conflicts between states rather than by ethnic differences.

The findings also have broader theoretical implications. First, they highlight the importance of distinguishing between ethnic divisions and ethnic relations. Unlike ethnic groups, relations between ethnic groups are not sticky and can deteriorate or recover relatively rapidly. Hence, characteristics of ethnic groups are unlikely candidates for explaining ethnic polarization and instances of political violence that follow such polarization. Second, by highlighting the way in which interstate conflicts shape interethnic relations, my dissertation also suggests a new explanation for ethnic polarization.

The idea that ethnic cleansing is caused by ethnic divisions has also had important practical implications. In particular, it has led to calls for partitioning groups or to the cynical belief that nothing can be done to prevent violence. By showing that interethnic polarization is a bi-product of interstate competition; my project implies that preventive strategies should focus on resolving conflicts between states or state-like actors rather than on partitioning groups.