

Prospectus presentation

16 November 2020

Hi everyone, thanks for joining today. I'm excited to present my prospectus for my dissertation project, "The Order of Violence: Pogroms in Comparative Perspective." First, thanks to my committee – my chair Laia, Andy, Jamil, and Chantal – who've provided invaluable feedback and support as this project has evolved, especially during the last six months. I have a longer list of colleagues, correspondents, friends, and family members who've also contributed in various ways since this began as a research paper in Laia's political violence class two years ago, but for the sake of time I'll save those for the dissertation itself. I only have 10 minutes, so let's jump right in.

I'll start with a brief description of the puzzle that motivates the work I've already begun about the Kristallnacht pogrom. I'm happy to discuss more about my preliminary research on this during the discussion section. Eighty-two years ago last week, an informal network of pogrom participants engaged in diverse types of violence against Jewish people and physical structures associated with the Jewish community in Germany and Austria, including killing, maiming, and desecration of synagogues, Jewish homes, and Jewish businesses. That night, pogrom participants damaged or destroyed two-thirds of Germany's synagogues. What explains why antisemitic violence occurred in some locations during Kristallnacht, but not in others?

This leads me to the general research question that motivates this project: what explains why groups carry out pogrom violence against others? This question points to two related but separate variations in violence. The first concerns the *process* of pogrom mobilization: What explains why pogrom organizers mobilize against certain groups, but not others? And the second is a question of the *political geography* of pogrom violence: What explains why pogroms result in violence against groups in some locations, but not others?

Answering these questions requires first that we define pogroms as a process and pattern of violence that differ systematically from other closely-related forms of mass violent mobilization. In this project, I define a pogrom as a relatively brief episode of multiple violent acts against people and physical structures associated with a select social community, by an informal group but involving some pattern of state complicity. In the prospectus, I talk at length about how the five dimensions of this definition – temporal scope, repertoire of tactics, organization, patterns of targeting, and patterns of state complicity – differ from other forms of violence. I won't address these in detail for the sake of brevity.

In the relevant literature about closely-related forms of violence and contention, explanations for violence encompass three families of causal variables. I'll discuss these briefly. First, explanations focused on attitudes suggest that pogrom violence occurs because of "deep-seated hatreds" or recurrent instances of past group-selective violence. Second, competition-based explanations suggest that pogrom violence occurs because groups or institutions mobilize pogroms to undermine threats to their political authority or economic status. Third, explanations focused on associations and intergroup relations suggest that pogrom violence occurs where homogenous "bonding" groups are strongest or heterogeneous "bridging" groups are too weak to

enable sustained contact or conflict resolution between the constituents of pogrom organizers and the groups whom these organizers target.

At the same time, historical studies and interpretive accounts of closely-related forms of violence and contention underscore that the political context in which pogrom organizers mobilize also shapes the process and pattern of violence. These “symbolic” explanations, however, do not offer a systematic account of the types of political context and how they shape the process by which pogrom organizers identify and mobilize against the groups that they target.

In this project, I plan to elaborate on and test a symbolic theory of pogrom violence. I expand on what I mean by symbolic in the prospectus, but briefly: Pogroms are symbolic because organizers of these episodes mark certain groups, their members, and their practices as objects of social exclusion by engaging in public, targeted violence against them. I expect that different types of political order—in particular, the interaction between the networks that pogrom organizers mobilize and the state—lead organizers to view pogroms as serving different strategic aims. Mapping out these different types and their implications requires more time than I have now, so I want to home in on the four different types of strategic aims that emerge from different relations between pogrom organizers and the state: order-reinforcing, order-transforming, order-producing, and disorder.

I expect that two competing explanations for pogrom violence will emerge from these varying contexts: (1) the extent to which pogrom organizers perceive the targeted group as a threat to their position in the political order; and (2) the visibility of the targeted group.

To test competing explanations for why pogrom organizers opt to mobilize a pogrom against the groups that they target, I will use process tracing methods. To test explanations for why violence occurs in some places but not in others, I will use multivariate regression analysis to compare instances of violence and its structural antecedents across spatial units in the geographic area within which pogrom organizers were active.

Empirically, I will focus on four ideal-type cases that correspond to the four strategic aims of pogrom violence that I described previously. The order-reinforcing case is Kristallnacht, which I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation. The order-transforming case is the attacks against Black residents of East St. Louis, Illinois, in July 1917. The order-producing case is the attacks against Mexican nationals in Brownsville, Texas, in July 1915. And the disorder case is the attacks against Black Britons of Caribbean origin in the Notting Hill neighborhood of London in late summer 1958. For the purposes of process tracing, these are “disciplined configurative” cases that are most likely to conform to the theoretical expectations of the symbolic theory but lack “most similar” or “most different” systems criteria. For the purposes of within-case statistical analysis, the different political orders that underpin each case should correspond to different patterns of violence.

Two types of observable implications correspond to the two different methods of analysis. For the process tracing component of this project, I’m interested in understanding the extent to which attitudes, competition, associations, and the visibility of the targeted group figured into the group-level organization of violence prior to each pogrom’s onset. For the statistical analysis,

I'm interested in understanding how these competing explanations vary across spatial units during the pogrom episode. We can divide these two sets of spatial explanations into the characteristics of the targeted group and the characteristics of the organizers and their constituents.

For the statistical analysis, I will ensure the robustness of my models to multiple ways of measuring violence, consistent with my definition of pogroms. I will also estimate my regression models using geographic fixed effects and spatial regression controls, which account for unobserved characteristics of particular regions or neighborhoods and the potential confounding effects of spatial diffusion across adjacent units, respectively.

This project will offer important theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for our understanding of pogroms, specifically, and political violence and ethnic politics, in general. I list them out in this slide, but will refrain from discussing them in detail for the sake of time.

I anticipate a few different challenges in conducting research on this topic in the next couple of years. First, I plan to spend more time thinking through how to observe the strength and extent of organizer networks across cases and the extent to which a targeted group is more or less visible within each case. Second, I also need to spend more time mapping each ideal type to a clear universe of global cases to demonstrate the external validity of the typology that I introduce here. Laia and I have discussed this previously. Third, I highlight in the prospectus document a few ethical dilemmas of data access, collection, and representation. I view the ethical obligations of violence research as an important dimension of our work as political scientists, so I'm interested in discussing these and other dilemmas further, either today or in the coming months.

Fourth, the ongoing travel constraints surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic present obvious obstacles to archival research and broader fieldwork about the East St. Louis, Brownsville, and Notting Hill cases. I do not anticipate needing to travel to complete my work about the Kristallnacht case. I expect to have more clarity on opportunities for remote archival research and information about COVID-related access issues as I correspond with archivists in the next couple of months.

And lastly, I anticipate that the causal-process observations that I discussed previously will be challenging to identify because of the general opacity of violent organizations. The existence of at least one historical monograph dedicated to explaining each pogrom and the process by which groups mobilized violence, however, offers some hope that adequate archival materials will allow me to evaluate different explanations for the pogrom's onset through the use of primary sources.

My next steps are twofold. First, I need to get a better handle on data availability. For the regression analysis, I have a strong sense of the press reporting and other resources that will inform my descriptive research about outcomes of violence in each case. The explanatory variables, however, will require more creative data collection strategies that build on demographic records, social histories, and other localized forms of information. Second, the qualitative work requires that I spend time developing "case narratives" for the East St. Louis, Brownsville, and Notting Hill cases, as I've done for the Kristallnacht case. This will require that

I spend more time working through the secondary literature about each case to get a better sense of the historiographical debates and broader social and political context that shaped the lead-up to violence.

I think I'll turn it back over to Laia now. I'm eager for the committee's feedback and the broader discussion. Thank you!